

CBSE -
English
class XII

GUIDED READING

A Collection of Short Stories



Guided Reading

A collection of short stories

(For Class XII)

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FOREWORD

The Central Board of Secondary Education has been working as a catalytic agent to bring about qualitative improvement in school education more particularly at the Secondary and Senior Secondary stages in the country by developing, inter alia, appropriate syllabi and courses for its member schools. Provision of suitable textbooks is another important factor by which the quality of education is being raised. The Board in the recent past took up a programme to prepare and publish books in some of the important areas in collaboration with expert agencies. The present textbook in English is the outcome of the same. The book has been written in keeping with the requirement of the students of class XII. It is hoped, it will be found useful by them.

The Board is grateful to the editors of the book for preparing the textbook. It also expresses its thankfulness to Prof Mohinder Singh, Convener of the Board's English Committee and all its members under whose guidance the book was prepared. It is also grateful to the C.I.E.F.L., Hyderabad, for its collaboration and providing technical help. To authors and publishers whose writings have been included in the textbook, the Board offers a special sense of gratitude.

Fr. T.V. Kunnunkal
Chairman
Central Board of Secondary Education
New Delhi

PREFACE

Guided Reading is an anthology of short stories prepared for the students of Class XII taking the Core Course in English of the Central Board of Secondary Education. The main aim of this book is to help the learner build good reading strategies at a relatively advanced level. Primarily devoted to advanced reading comprehension, *Guided Reading* will also lead to an enrichment of the learner's vocabulary and greater insights into the language.

The eight short stories included in this collection are by modern Indian, British, Irish, Russian and African writers; they represent a variety of theme and style. While four stories—'Mrs. Packletide's Tiger', 'Captain Patch', 'Going into Exile', and 'God is Near'—have been slightly abridged, the other four have been reproduced without any alteration or simplification. No attempt has been made to render into standard English slang and colloquial expressions found in some of them (e.g. 'God is Near', 'Coin-diver'). In all this we have assumed that the Class XII learner has reached a level of reading maturity where he can encounter an unsimplified text reasonably well. Care has, however, been taken in selecting the stories—none of them presents any cultural or conceptual difficulties to the learner.

The comprehension exercises which follow each story are divided into two sections: 'Understanding the Story'

and 'Appreciating the Story'. The first section concentrates on comprehension—global and local—attempted mainly through factual and inferential questions. A global comprehension question calls for an overall understanding of the text while a local question demands the awareness of one or another important point of detail.

The second section—'Appreciating the Story'—aims at developing in the learner skills of appreciation; here we highlight some of the major literary techniques employed by the authors of the stories. Under this section appear questions which encourage critical or evaluative and creative reading. These questions, it is hoped, will generate a good deal of interesting classroom discussion.

The questions following each story cover its important aspects and details. No attempt has been made, however, to ask questions on every detail of the story. This may leave some additional work which the teacher can attempt. If a teacher finds these questions too difficult for his students he may ask them a few easy ones, mostly of a factual kind, before the questions in the text are taken up for discussion. On the other hand, it is also possible that these questions may not present sufficient challenge to certain students; the teacher may in that case, frame a few additional, more challenging questions.

Guided Reading is not a rigidly structured book; it allows the teacher considerable freedom to teach it to suit the needs of his class. We, however, recommend the following procedure.

- (i) The teacher introduces each story through a brief talk on the story. Such an introductory talk should stimulate interest. It should not be a summary of the story!

- (ii) The students read the story at home and come prepared for a discussion.
- (iii) The answers to the questions given in the book are discussed orally in the classroom. Full written answers are not, as a rule, demanded from the class. The class may, however, be encouraged to note down points for such a discussion. A point to note is that not every question demands a single, correct answer. We have deliberately asked questions, especially under 'Appreciating the Story', which can have more answers than one, all equally acceptable. What matters is the justification offered for the preferred answer, and the healthy give and take thus created in the classroom.

Some other features of the book are: foot-of-the-page glossing to facilitate quick and easy reference, brief notes on the authors and suggestions for further reading to encourage the learner to read more on his own. The glossary is by no means exhaustive; only such words as are crucial to the understanding of the text and/or present special problems are glossed. Learners must be encouraged to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context and, if that fails, to consult a dictionary.

We are grateful to Dr Ramesh Mohan, Director, CIEFL, for the encouragement and facilities provided during the preparation of this book.

We would like to acknowledge the valuable help and guidance received from the members of the Committee of Courses (for English) of the CBSE during the planning and preparation of this book. We are also grateful to the

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THE MARK OF VISHNU

Khushwant Singh

About the Authors:

Khushwant Singh is well-known as a novelist, short story writer, historian and translator. His first collection of short stories, *Mark of Vishnu*, appeared in London in 1950 and was an immediate success. His other books include two novels, *Train to Pakistan* and *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*. He has also written a history of the Sikhs. Khushwant Singh was the editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* for several years.

“This is for the Kala Nag,” said Gunga Ram, pouring the milk into the saucer. “Every night I leave it outside the hole near the wall and it’s gone by the morning.”

“Perhaps it is the cat,” we youngsters suggested.

“Cat !” said Gunga Ram with contempt. “No cat goes near that hole. Kala Nag lives there. As long as I give him milk, he will not bite anyone in this house. You can all go about with bare feet and play where you like.”

We were not having any patronage¹ from Gunga Ram.

“You’re a stupid old Brahmin,” I said. “Don’t you know snakes don’t drink milk? At least one couldn’t drink a saucerful every day. The teacher told us that a snake eats only once in several days. We saw a grass snake which had just swallowed a frog. It stuck like a blob in its throat and took several days to dissolve and go down its tail. We’ve got dozens of them in the lab in methylated spirit². Why,

1. patronage : support, encouragement

2. methylated spirit : kind of alcohol used for lighting, heating something or for preserving dead insects and animals.

last month the teacher bought one from a snake-charmer which could run both ways. It had another head with a pair of eyes at the tail. You should have seen the fun when it was put in the jar. There wasn't an empty one in the lab. So the teacher put it in one which had a Russels viper. He caught its two ends with a pair of forceps, dropped it in the jar, and quickly put the lid on. There was an absolute storm as it went round and round in the glass tearing the decayed viper into shreds."

Gunga Ram shut his eyes in pious horror.

"You will pay for it one day. Yes, you will."

It was no use arguing with Gunga Ram. He, like all good Hindus, believed in the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva—the creator, preserver, and destroyer. Of these he was most devoted to Vishnu. Every morning he smeared his forehead with a V mark in sandalwood paste to honour the deity. Although a Brahmin, he was illiterate and full of superstition. To him, all life was sacred, even if it was of a serpent or scorpion or centipede. Whenever he saw one he quickly shoved it away lest we kill it. He picked up wasps we battered with our badminton rackets and tended³ their damaged wings. Sometimes he got stung. It never seemed to shake his faith. The more dangerous the animal the more devoted Gunga Ram was to its existence. Hence the regard for snakes; above all, the cobra, who was the Kala Nag.

"We will kill your Kala Nag if we see him."

"I won't let you. It's laid a hundred eggs and if you kill it all the eggs will become cobras and the house will be full of them. Then what will you do?"

"We'll catch them alive and send them to Bombay. They milk them there for anti-snake-bite serum. They

3. tend : watch over, attend to (e.g. a patient)

pay two rupees for a live cobra. That makes two hundred rupees straightaway.”

“You doctors must have udders⁴. I never saw a snake have any. But don’t you dare touch this one. It is a *phannyar*—it is hooded. I’ve seen it. It’s three hands long. As for its hood !” Gunga Ram opened the palms of his hands and his head swayed from side to side. “You should see it basking on the lawn in the sunlight.”

“That just proves what a liar you are. The *phannyar* is the male, so it couldn’t have laid the hundred eggs. You must have laid the eggs yourself.”

The party burst into peals of laughter.

“Must be Gunga Ram’s eggs. We’ll soon have a hundred Gunga Rams.”

Gunga Ram was squashed⁵. It was the lot of a servant to be constantly squashed. But having the children of the household make fun of him was too much even for Gunga Ram. They were constantly belittling him with their new-fangled⁶ ideas. They never read their scriptures. Nor even what the Mahatma said about non-violence. It was just shotguns to kill birds and the jars of methylated spirit to drown snakes. Gunga Ram would stick to his faith in the sanctity⁷ of life. He would feed and protect snakes because snakes were the most vile⁸ of God’s creatures on earth. If you could love them, instead of killing them, you proved your point.

What the point was which Gunga Ram wanted to

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- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 4. udder | : fleshy ‘bag’ of a cow, goat, etc from which milk comes. |
| 5. squash | : (here) defeat |
| 6. new-fangled | : newly come into fashion (and therefore not liked or respected by all) |
| 7. sanctity | : holiness |
| 8. vile | : bad, evil |

prove was not clear. He just proved it by leaving the saucerful of milk by the snake hole every night and finding it gone in the mornings.

One day we saw Kala Nag. The monsoons had burst with all their fury and it had rained in the night. The earth which had lain parched and dry under the withering heat of the summer sun was teeming⁹ with life. In little pools frogs croaked. The muddy ground was littered with crawling worms, centipedes and velvety lady-birds¹⁰. Grass had begun to show and the banana leaves glistened bright and glossy green. The rain had flooded Kala Nag's hole. He sat in an open patch on the lawn. His shiny black hood glistened in the sunlight. He was big—almost six feet in length, and rounded and fleshy, as my wrist.

“Looks like a King Cobra. Let's get him.”

Kala Nag did not have much of a chance. The ground was slippery and all the holes and gutters were full of water. Gunga Ram was not at home to help.

Armed with long bamboo sticks, we surrounded Kala Nag before he even scented danger. When he saw us his eyes turned a fiery red and he hissed and spat on all sides. Then like lightning Kala Nag made for the banana grove.

The ground was too muddy and he slithered¹¹. He had hardly gone five yards when a stick caught him in the middle and broke his back. A volley of blows reduced him to a squishy-squashy pulp of black and white jelly, spattered¹² with blood and mud. His head was still undamaged.

“Don't damage the hood,” yelled one of us. “We'll take Kala Nag to school.”

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|---------------|---|
| 9. teem (v) | : have in great number or quantity |
| 10. lady-bird | : a bright insect, a flying beetle with black spots |
| 11. slither | : slip or slide unsteadily |
| 12. spatter | : splash or scatter in drips |

So we slid a bamboo stick under the cobra's belly and lifted him on the end of the pole. We put him in a large biscuit tin and tied it up with string. We hid the tin under a bed.

At night I hung around Gunga Ram waiting for him to get his saucer of milk. "Aren't you going to take any milk for the Kala Nag tonight?"

"Yes," answered Gunga Ram irritably. "You go to bed."

He did not want any more argument on the subject.

"He won't need the milk any more."

Gunga Ram paused.

"Why?"

"Oh, nothing. There are so many frogs about. They must taste better than your milk. You never put any sugar in it anyway."

The next morning Gunga Ram brought back the saucer with the milk still in it. He looked sullen¹³ and suspicious.

"I told you snakes like frogs better than milk."

Whilst we changed and had breakfast Gunga Ram hung around us. The school bus came and we clambered into it with the tin. As the bus started we held out the tin to Gunga Ram.

"Here's your Kala Nag. Safe in this box. We are going to put him in spirit."

We left him standing speechless, staring at the departing bus.

There was great excitement in the school. We were a

13. sullen

: silently angry, bad-tempered

set of four brothers, known for our toughness. We had proved it again.

“A King Cobra.”

“Six feet long.”

“*Phannyar*.”

The tin was presented to the science teacher.

It was on the teacher's table, and we waited for him to open it and admire our kill. The teacher pretended to be indifferent and set us some problems to work on. With studied matter-of-factness he fetched his forceps and a jar with a banded Krait lying curled in muddy methylated spirit. He began to hum and untie the cord around the box.

As soon as the cord was loosened the lid flew into the air, just missing the teacher's nose. There was Kala Nag. His eyes burnt like embers¹⁴ and his hood was taut and undamaged. With a loud hiss he went for the teacher's face. The teacher pushed himself back on the chair and toppled over. He fell on the floor and stared at the cobra, petrified¹⁵ with fear. The boys stood up on their desks and yelled hysterically.

Kala Nag surveyed the scene with his bloodshot eyes. His forked tongue darted in and out excitedly. He spat furiously and then made a bid for freedom. He fell out of the tin onto the floor with a loud plop. His back was broken in several places and he dragged himself painfully to the door. When he got to the threshold he drew himself up once again with his hood outspread to face another danger.

Outside the classroom stood Gunga Ram with a saucer

-
14. ember : small piece of burning wood or coal in a dying fire.
15. petrify : change into stone, make motionless.

and a jug of milk. As soon as he saw Kala Nag come up he went down on his knees. He poured the milk into the saucer and placed it near the threshold. With hands folded in prayer he bowed his head to the ground craving forgiveness. In desperate fury, the cobra hissed and spat and bit Gunga Ram all over the head—then with great effort dragged himself into a gutter and wriggled out of view.

Gunga Ram collapsed with hands covering his face. He groaned in agony. The poison blinded him instantly. Within a few minutes he turned pale and blue and froth appeared in his mouth. On his forehead were little drops of blood. These the teacher wiped with his handkerchief. Underneath was the V mark where the Kala Nag had dug his fangs.

Understanding the Story

1. Gunga Ram was
 - (a) a learned Brahmin.
 - (b) one of the narrator's teachers.
 - (c) the narrator's servant.
2. Gunga Ram never hurt any animal because
 - (a) he was very timid.
 - (b) he believed all life was sacred.
 - (c) he was very kind.
3. The narrator and his brothers
 - (a) were angry with Gunga Ram.
 - (b) made fun of Gunga Ram.
 - (c) played a practical joke on Gunga Ram.
4. How did the narrator and his brothers manage to capture the six-foot cobra?
5. When did Gunga Ram realize that the boys had captured his Kala Nag?
6. Why did Kala Nag bite Gunga Ram? Do you think that the snake recognized him as the one who had been feeding it every day?

Appreciating the Story

1. In the first part of the story when the four brothers make fun of Gunga Ram and his devotion to Kala Nag, he says: "You will pay for it one day. Yes, you will." In the last part of the story one finds that it is none of the boys but Gunga Ram who dies because of Kala Nag's bite. This is ironical.

Irony is a literary technique many writers employ. An ironical statement is one which says something but means exactly the opposite. An ironical happening is one which is the exact opposite of what is expected. Gunga Ram's death belongs to the second kind.

Given below are a few details from the story. Which of them do you think heighten or sharpen the irony in Gunga Ram's death? Support your answer.

- (i) Gunga Ram used to give Kala Nag a saucerful of milk every night without fail.
 - (ii) Gunga Ram was bitten to death when he tried to offer Kala Nag milk.
 - (iii) The four brothers considered Gunga Ram to be rather stupid.
 - (iv) Gunga Ram said; "As long as I give him (Kala Nag) milk, he will not bite anyone in the house."
 - (v) Gunga Ram had the 'V' mark on his forehead when he died.
 - (vi) Gunga Ram died of snake-bite in the midst of people (teacher and pupils) who were going to put Kala Nag in methylated spirit.
 - (vii) Kala Nag's back was broken.
2. Would you say that the development of the plot is artificial? The narrator says that the snake had been "reduced to a squishy-squashy pulp of black and white jelly." Although Kala Nag's head was undamaged, how could it crawl out of the biscuit tin and escape when it was in such a state? Is Gunga Ram's going on his knees to offer milk to Kala Nag on its way out of the classroom realistic?
3. The story is presented as a first person account of what happened in the narrator's school days. How effective is the technique of first person narration? What effect would the story have lost or gained if it had been presented as a third person account?

Further Reading

Khushwant Singh

: *Bride for the Sahib and Other Stories*
: *Black Jasmine.*

THE MALEFACTOR

Anton Chekhov

About the Author:

Chekhov (1860-1904) is a world famous Russian dramatist and short-story writer. He lived in the pre-revolutionary Russia where the poor peasant starved and was oppressed by the rich. Many of his stories and plays are about the poor, uneducated peasant. *The Cherry Orchard*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Sea Gull* and *Three Sisters* are among the best known of Chekhov's plays. Many of his short stories can be read in *The Image of Chekhov*.

The tiny and extraordinarily skinny peasant, wearing patched drawers¹ and a shirt of striped linen, stood facing the investigating magistrate. His hairy face was pitted with smallpox, and his eyes, scarcely visible under thick overhanging brows, conveyed an expression of sullen resentment². He wore his hair in a tangled unkempt thatch³ which somehow emphasized his sullen spiderlike character. He was barefoot.

"Denis Grigoryev!" the magistrate began. "Step closer, and answer my questions. On the morning of July 7 the linesman Ivan Semyonov Akinfov, while performing the duty of examining the tracks, found you in proximity to the one-hundred-and-forty-first mile post unscrewing one of the nuts from the bolt securing the rail to the tie⁴. The nut is here. He thereupon arrested you with the nut in

1. drawers : knickers

2. sullen resentment : silent angry feeling that one has been insulted, ignored

3. unkempt thatch : untidy hair

4. tie : (here) railway sleeper

your possession. Do you testify to the truth of this statement?"

"What?"

"Did all this happen as stated by Akinfov?"

"Sure—yes, it did."

"Excellent. Now why were you unscrewing the nut?"

"Wha-at?"

"Stop saying 'what' and answer the question! Why were you unscrewing the nut?"

"I wouldn't have unscrewed it, would I, if I hadn't wanted it?" Denis said hoarsely, squinting up at the ceiling.

"What on earth was the good of the nut to you?"

"The nut, eh? Well, we make sinkers⁵ out of 'em."

"Who is 'we'?"

"We—the people in the village. The peasants of kiimovo...."

"Listen, fellow. Don't play the fool with me. Learn to talk sense. Don't tell me any lies about sinkers!"

"Me, tell lies? All my life I haven't told any lies, and now..." Denis muttered, his eyes blinking. "Your Honour, I ask you, what can you do without sinkers? Now, if you put live worms on the hook, how do you think it touches the bottom without a sinker? So I'm lying, am I?" he smirked⁶ "Then what is the good of live bait floating on the surface? The perch⁷ and pike⁸ and eelpout⁹ always go

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|------------|---|
| 5. sinker | : weight attached to a fishing line or net to keep it under water |
| 6. smirk | : smile in a silly, self-satisfied manner |
| 7. perch | : freshwater fish used as food |
| 8. pike | : large, fierce, freshwater fish |
| 9. eelpout | : long, snake-like fish |

along the bottom, while if the bait floats on the surface there's only the snapper¹⁰ will bite, and that doesn't happen often.... And there are no snappers in our part of the country.... Our fish like a lot of space...."

"What's all this talk about snappers?"

"Wha-at? Why, you asked me that yourself ! I'm telling how the gentry¹¹ catch fish, but the very stupidest child wouldn't try to catch anything without a sinker. **Maybe** a man without a brain in his head **might** try to catch a fish without a sinker, but there's no accounting for people like that!"

"According to you, the nut was unscrewed so you could use it as a sinker. Is that right?"

"Well, it couldn't be anything else, could it? I wasn't playing knucklebones with it, was I?"

"Instead of a nut, you could have used a bit of lead or a bullet—perhaps a nail would have served the same purpose?"

"Well, your Honour, as for that, you don't find lead lying about in the street, and it has to be paid for, and a nail—a nail's no use at all. There's nothing better than a nut.... It is heavy, and has a hole in it...."

"The witness is determined to convince us he is out of his wits—pretends he was born yesterday or fell out of the sky! Really, you miserable blockhead, don't you understand what happens when you unscrew these nuts? If the linesman had not seen you at work, the train could have gone off the rails, people could have been killed, and the responsibility for killing them would have been yours !"

"Oh, God forbid, Your Honor! No! Why should I kill

10 snapper

: a type of fish

11. gentry

: people of high social position

anybody ! Do you think we are criminals or heathen¹² , eh? Ah, good gentlemen, we thank God we have lived our lives without ever letting such an idea as killing people enter our heads ! Save us and have mercy on us, Queen of Heaven! What were you saying, sir?"

"How do you suppose train wrecks happen? Doesn't it occur to you that if a few nuts are unscrewed, you can have a train wreck?"

Denis smirked and screwed up his eyes incredulously¹³ at the magistrate.

"Why, Your Honor, we peasants have been unscrewing nuts for a good many years now, and the good Lord has protected us, and as for a train wreck and killing people, why, nothing at all.... Now, if I took up a whole rail or put a big balk¹⁴ of timber across the track, maybe I could smash up a train..... But just an ordinary nut, pfui !"

"Can you get it into your head that the nut holds the rail to the tie?"

"Of course, Your Honor. We understand that. That's why we don't unscrew all of them. We leave some of them. We've got heads on our shoulders.... We know what's what...."

Denis yawned and made the sign of the cross over his mouth.

"Last year a train went off the rails here," the magistrate said. "Now we know how it happened."

"Beg pardon."

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- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 12. heathen | : believer in a religion other than the chief world religions |
| 13. incredulously | : unbelievably |
| 14. balk | : thick, roughly squared beam of wood |

"I said, now we know why the train went off the rails last year. It's all clear now."

"Good kind gentlemen, God gave you understanding, and He gives it to whom He pleases. You know about things, how it happened, what happened, and all, but the linesman, he was a peasant, too, not a man with an education, and he took me by the collar and carted me off! He ought to know about things before dragging people off! A peasant has the brains of peasant—that's what they say. And write down, too, Your Honor, that he hit me twice—once in the jaw and once in the chest."

"Listen, when they searched your place, they found another nut.... Now, where and when was that one unscrewed?"

"You mean the one they found under the little red chest?"

"I don't know anything about where it was. I only know they found it. When did you unscrew that one?"

"I didn't unscrew it. It was given to me by Ignashka, the son of one-eyed Semyon. I'm talking about the one under the chest. The one they found in the yard, on the sleigh¹⁵—that one was unscrewed by Mitrofan and me."

"Which Mitrofan?"

"Mitrofan Petrov. Do you mean to say you've never heard of him? He's the one who makes nets in our village and sells them to the gentry. He needs a lot of nuts. Every net, I reckon must have about ten nuts."

"Listen. According to Article 1081 of the Penal Code, every willful act leading to the damage of a railroad and calculated¹⁶ to jeopardize¹⁷ the passage of trains, shall, if

15. sleigh : sledge, especially one drawn by a horse

16. calculated : (here) intended

17. jeopardize : put in danger

the perpetrator¹⁸ knows the act will cause an accident —*knows*, you understand?—and for that matter you couldn't help knowing the consequences of unscrewing the nut—such a man is liable to exile with hard labour....”

“Oh, well, you know best. We ignorant people, we don't know anything....”

“You do know! You're lying and shamming¹⁹ ignorance !”

“Why should I lie? Ask in the village if you don't believe me ! Only the bleak²⁰ fish can be caught without a sinker, that's true ! There's no fish worse than a gudgeon²¹, and even he won't bite without a sinker.”

“You'll be talking about snappers next,” the magistrate smiled.

“I told you, we don't have snappers in our part of the country... Now, if we cast out lines on the surface without a sinker, with a butterfly for bait, we might maybe catch a mullet²², but it don't happen often.”

“Shut up !”

Then there was silence, while Denis shifted from one foot to the other, stared at the table covered with a green cloth, and violently blinked his eyes. He was like someone gazing, not at the green cloth, but at the sun. The magistrate was writing rapidly.

“May I be getting along now?” Denis asked a moment later.

“No, you'll be kept in custody and sent to prison.”

-
- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| 18. perpetrator | : one who commits an error, a crime |
| 19. sham | : pretend to be |
| 20. bleak | : a small river fish |
| 21. gudgeon | : a small freshwater fish |
| 22. mullet | : kind of seafish |

Denis stopped blinking. Raising his thick eyebrows, he looked inquiringly in the direction of the magistrate.

“What do you mean, prison? Your Honor, I haven’t the time for prison ! I’ve got to go to the fair—there’s Yegor, who owes me three rubles for the lard²³ he...”

“Keep your mouth shut, and don’t disturb me !”

“Prison, eh? Now, listen. If I’d done anything wrong, then I’d go... but there’s neither rhyme nor reason in sending me... What for should I go to prison? I haven’t stolen anything so far as I know. I haven’t been fighting... If there’s any question in your mind about the arrears, well, your Honor, you shouldn’t believe the village elder... Ask the permanent member of the board... The elder he hasn’t been baptized²⁴...”

“Silence !”

“All right. I’ll be silent,” Denis murmured. “But I’ll take my oath the elder lied about the assessment. There are three of us brothers—Kuzma Grigoryev, then Yegor Grigoryev, and then Denis Grigoryev....”

“You’re a nuisance,” the magistrate shouted. “Hey, Semyon ! Take him away !”

“We’re three brothers,” Denis went on muttering, while two husky soldiers took hold of him and led him out of the room. “A brother doesn’t have to answer for a brother, does he? Kuzma won’t pay. So it’s up to you, Denis... Judges, indeed! Our late master, the general, is dead, may God rest his soul, or he would have shown you what’s what... You ought to judge sensibly, not in a cockeyed way... Flog a man, you understand, but only when he deserves it... Understand?....”

23. lard : fat of pigs prepared for use in cooking

24. baptize : immerse someone in water, to make him a member of the Christian Church

Understanding the Story

1. What crime is Denis charged with?
2. Why does Denis need nuts?
3. Do the villagers (like Denis) know that the removal of nuts from railtracks may lead to train accidents? Support your answer with relevant details from the text.
4. Denis is surprised that the magistrate does not know Mitrofan, who makes nets in Denis's village. What does this tell you about the peasant's character? Give two more instances from the text to support your view of him.
5. Do you think Denis is rude to the magistrate? Does the magistrate think that Denis is rude to him? Justify your answers.
6. Is Denis a god-fearing man? How can you tell?
7. Is Denis surprised by the decision of the magistrate to send him to prison? Support your answer with details from the text.
8. '..... I haven't stolen anything so far as I know. I haven't been fighting..... If there's any question in your mind about the arrears...'

Denis has been charged with only one crime—removing nuts from the railtrack. Why then does he refer to these crimes?

Appreciating the Story

1. Do you think the magistrate was being fair to Denis in sending him to prison? Why/Why not?
2. From the way Denis speaks to the magistrate, what can you gather about his views on crime, guilt, and law?
3. Imagine that you are the magistrate and that Denis is brought before you for trial. What judgement will you pass? Why?

4. What do you think is the author's attitude to the magistrate's judgement?

Note that the author does not say anything: he merely presents to us the conversation between the judge and the accused. This is a technique adopted by some writers to make their stories interesting and gripping. An indirect statement of attitudes is far more effective than a direct one. Decide what the author's attitude is and discuss how effectively it is presented through the story.

5. A malefactor is a **wrong-doer**, a criminal. Does this description fit Denis, the peasant? Why?
6. Note the use of language by the two main characters in the story. What does it indicate to you about their social position?

Further Reading

Chekhov, A.

: *Lady with Lap Dog and Other Stories*
translated by David Magarshack
(Penguin)

MRS. PACKLETIDE'S TIGER

Saki

About the Author:

'Saki' is the pseudonym of H.H. Munro (1870-1916). Educated in England, Munro found the short story his favourite form of writing. His wit and humour have made him famous as one of the most delightful short story writers. Munro published several collections of short stories: *Reginald*, *Reginald in Russia*, *The Chronicle of Clovis*, *Beasts and Super-Beasts*, *The Toys of Peace*, and *The Square Egg*. 'Mrs Packletide's Tiger' appears in the collection '*The Chronicle of Clovis*'.

It was Mrs. Packletide's pleasure and intention that she should shoot a tiger. Not that the lust¹ to kill had suddenly descended on her, or that she felt that she would leave India safer and more wholesome than she had found it, with one fraction less of wild beast per million of inhabitants. The compelling motive for her sudden deviation towards the footsteps of Nimrod was the fact that Loona Bimberton had recently been carried eleven miles in an aeroplane by an Algerian aviator², and talked of nothing else; only a personally procured tiger-skin and a heavy harvest of Press photographs could successfully counter³ that sort of thing. Mrs. Packletide had already arranged in her mind the lunch she would give at her house in Curzon Street, ostensibly⁴ in Loona Bimberton's honour, with a tiger-skin rug occupying most of the foreground and all of the conversation. She had also

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|---------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. lust | : strong desire |
| 2. aviator | : pilot |
| 3. counter | : oppose, meet an attack |
| 4. ostensibly | : seemingly, but not really |

already designed in her mind the tiger-claw brooch that she was going to give Loona Bimberton on her next birthday. In a world that is supposed to be chiefly swayed by hunger and by love Mrs. Packletide was an exception: her movements and motives were largely governed by dislike of Loona Bimberton.

Circumstances proved propitious⁵. Mrs. Packletide had offered a thousand rupees for the opportunity of shooting a tiger without overmuch risk or exertion, and it so happened that a neighbouring village could boast of being the favoured rendezvous⁶ of an animal of respectable antecedents⁷, which had been driven by the increasing infirmities of age to abandon game-killing and confine⁸ its appetite to the smaller domestic animals. The prospect of earning the thousand rupees had stimulated the sporting and commercial instinct of the villagers; children were posted night and day on the outskirts of the local jungle to head the tiger back in the unlikely event of his attempting to roam away to fresh hunting-grounds, and the cheaper kinds of goats were left about with elaborate carelessness to keep him satisfied with his present quarters. The one great anxiety was lest he should die of old age before the date appointed for the memsahib's shoot. Mothers carrying their babies home through the jungle after the day's work in the fields hushed their singing lest they might curtail the restful sleep of the venerable⁹ herd-robber.

The great night duly arrived, moonlit and cloudless. A platform had been constructed in a comfortable and conveniently placed tree, and thereon crouched Mrs. Packletide and her paid companion, Miss Mebbin. A goat.

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|----------------|----------------|
| 5. propitious | : favourable |
| 6. rendezvous | : meeting |
| 7. antecedents | : past history |
| 8. confine (v) | : limit |
| 9. venerable | : respectable |

gifted with a particularly persistent bleat, such as even a partially deaf tiger might be reasonably expected to hear on a still night, was tethered¹⁰ at the correct distance. With an accurately sighted rifle and a thumb-nail pack of patience¹¹ cards the sportswoman awaited the coming of the quarry¹².

"I suppose we are in some danger?" said Miss Mebbin.

She was not actually nervous about the wild beast, but she had a morbid dread of performing an atom more service than she had been paid for.

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Packletide: "It's a very old tiger. It couldn't spring up here even if it wanted to."

"If it's an old tiger I think you ought to get it cheaper. A thousand rupees is a lot of money."

Louisa Mebbin adopted a protective elder-sister attitude towards money in general, irrespective of nationality or denomination. Her energetic intervention had saved many a rouble¹³ from dissipating¹⁴ itself in tips in some Moscow hotel, and francs and centimes¹⁵ clung to her instinctively under circumstances which would have driven them headlong from less sympathetic hands. Her speculations as to the market depreciation¹⁶ of tiger remnants were cut short by the appearance on the scene of the animal itself. As soon as it caught sight of the tethered goat it lay flat on the earth, seemingly less from a desire to take advantage of all available cover than for the purpose

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|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 10. tether | : tie |
| 11. patience | : a game of cards for one player |
| 12. quarry | : animal hunted |
| 13. rouble | : Russian currency |
| 14. dissipate | : (here) waste foolishly |
| 15. francs and centimes | : French currency |
| 16. depreciation | : loss of value |

of snatching a short rest before commencing the grand attack.

"I believe it's ill," said Louisa Mebbin, loudly in Hindustani, for the benefit of the village headman, who was in ambush in a neighbouring tree.

"Hush !" said Mrs. Packletide, and at that moment the tiger commenced ambling¹⁷ towards his victim.

"Now, now !" urged Miss Mebbin with some excitement; "If he doesn't touch the goat we needn't pay for it." (The bait was an extra.).

The rifle flashed out with a loud report, and the great tawny beast sprang to one side and then rolled over in the stillness of death. In a moment a crowd of excited natives had swarmed on to the scene, and their shouting speedily carried the glad news to the village, where a thumping of tomtoms¹⁸ took up the chorus of triumph. And their triumph and rejoicing found a ready echo in the heart of Mrs. Packletide; already that luncheon-party in Curzon Street seemed immeasurably nearer.

It was Louisa Mebbin who drew attention to the fact that the goat was in death-throes from a mortal¹⁹ bullet-wound, while no trace of the rifle's deadly work could be found on the tiger. Evidently the wrong animal had been hit, and the beast of prey had succumbed to heart-failure, caused by the sudden report of the rifle, accelerated by senile decay²⁰. Mrs. Packletide was pardonably annoyed at the discovery; but, at any rate, she was the possessor of a dead tiger, and the villagers, anxious for their thousand rupees, gladly connived²¹ at the fiction that she had shot

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| 17. amble | : walk very slowly |
| 18. tomtom | : a long and narrow drum |
| 19. mortal | : fatal |
| 20. senile decay | : loss of health and power owing to old age |
| 21. connive | : silently approve |

the beast. And Miss Mebbin was a paid companion. Therefore did Mrs. Packletide face the cameras with a light heart, and her pictured fame reached from the pages of the *Texas Weekly Snapshot* to the illustrated Monday Supplement of the *Novoye Vremya*. As for Loona Bimberton, she refused to look at an illustrated paper for weeks, and her letter of thanks for the gift of a tiger-claw brooch was a model of repressed emotions. The luncheon-party she declined; there are limits beyond which repressed emotions become dangerous.

"How amused every one would be if they knew what really happened," said Lousia Mebbin a few days later.

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Packletide quickly.

"How you shot the goat and frightened the tiger to death," said Miss Mebbin, with her disagreeably pleasant laugh.

"No one would believe it," said Mrs. Packletide her face changing colour as rapidly as though it were going through a book of patterns before post-time.

"Loona Bimberton would," said Miss Mebbin. Mrs. Packletide's face settled on an unbecoming shade of greenish white.

"You surely wouldn't give me away?" she asked.

"I've seen a week-end cottage near Dorking that I should rather like to buy," said Miss Mebbin with seeming irrelevance. "Six hundred and eighty, freehold. Quite a bargain, only I don't happen to have the money."

Louisa Mebbin's pretty week-end cottage, christened by her "Les Fauves,"²² and gay in summer-time with its

22. Les Fauves : The Wild Beasts

garden borders of tiger-lilies,²³ is the wonder and admiration of her friends.

“It is a marvel how Louisa manages to do it.” is the general verdict.

Mrs. Packletide indulges in no more big-game shooting.

“The incidental expenses are so heavy,” she confides to inquiring friends.

(Slightly abridged)

Understanding the Story.

1. No dates are given in the story. Can you, however, guess roughly when the story takes place? What is your clue?
 - (a) The eighteenth century.
 - (b) Early twentieth century.
 - (c) Second half of the twentieth century.
2. Mrs Packletide's adventure takes place in
 - (a) India.
 - (b) Algeria.
 - (c) England.What are your clues? (Mention at least three.)
3. Mrs Packletide decides to shoot a tiger because
 - (a) she is interested in big game hunting.
 - (b) the tiger is a nuisance to the people of the neighbouring village.
 - (c) she wants a beautiful tiger-skin rug for her drawing-room.
 - (d) she wants to show Loona Bimberton that she (Mrs Packletide) is more adventurous than her (Loona).
4. What causes the old tiger's death?
5. How does Louisa Manage to buy a week-end cottage near Dorking? Can you guess why she calls it 'Les Fauves'?
6. 'Mrs Packletide indulges in no more big-game shooting.' 'The

23. tiger-lily : a lily with orange flowers with black spots

incidental expenses are so heavy," she confides to inquiring friends.'

What are the incidental expenses that Mrs Packletide refers to?

Appreciating the story

1. In "Mrs Packletide's Tiger", Saki is
 - (a) giving us an interesting description of the death of an old tiger.
 - (b) telling us a story about the rivalry between two women.
 - (c) making fun of ignorant Indian villagers.
 - (d) making fun of the vanity of (some) women.
2. "Mrs Packletide's Tiger" is indeed a humorous story. Saki, the author, employs several techniques to arouse laughter. He uses serious language for simple and silly things, exaggerates certain aspects of life, describes an elaborate preparation for something that does not need any preparation at all, hints at certain absurdities of life, etc.

Now mention three parts of the story that you find most humorous. Why are they humorous?
3. The language of the following fragment is humorous: "...with a tiger-skin rug occupying most of the foreground and all of the conversation." This is mainly because of linking 'foreground' and 'conversation' (which have nothing in common) by using the same verb (occupying) for both, and by cleverly using the words 'most' and 'all'. Can you spot in the story any other instance of language being used for comic effects?
4. In this story Saki makes you laugh. Does he do anything besides? Is there any criticism of society in the story?
5. One can conclude from the story that Louisa Mebbin is a shrewd and stingy person. Quote from the text to support this conclusion.

Further Reading

Munro, H.H.

: *The Short Stories of Saki*
(Introduced by C. Marley)

DROUGHT

Sarat Chandra Chatterjee

About the Author:

Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1938) was a Bengali novelist and short-story writer. His first story, *Mandir* (Temple) was published in 1907. Thereafter, he became a popular literary figure. Sarat Chandra Chatterjee wrote a dozen novels and many short stories in which he created an authentic picture of rural Bengal. These books have been translated into all the major Indian languages.

The village was called Kashipur. It was a small village, but its *Zamindar* was smaller still. Yet his tenants dared not stand up to him. He was so ruthless.

It was the birthday of his youngest son. It was noon. Tarakaratna, the priest, was on his way home from the landlord's house, where he had been offering prayers. It was nearing the end of May, but not a patch of cloud could be seen in the sky. The rainless firmament¹ poured fire.

At the end of the field, beside the road, there stood the house of Gafur; the weaver. Now that the mud walls were in ruins, the courtyard touched the public highway, and the inner privacy was thrown on the mercy of the passers-by.

"Hey! Gafur! Is anybody in?" called out Tarakaratna, standing in the shade of a tree by the roadside.

"What do you want? Father is down with fever,"

1. firmament : sky

answered Gafur's little daughter, aged ten, appearing at the door.

"Fever! Call the scoundrel!"

The noise brought Gafur out, shivering with fever. A bull was tied to the old acacia² that leaned against the broken wall.

"What do I see there?" demanded Tarakaratna, indicating the bull. "Do you realise that this is a Hindu village and the landlord himself a Brahmin?" His face was crimson³ with indignation⁴ and the heat of the sun. It was to be expected that his words should be hot and harsh. But Gafur simply looked at him, unable to follow the import⁵ of his words.

"Well," said Tarakaratna, "I saw it tied there in the morning and it's still there. If the bull dies, your master will flay⁶ you alive! He is no ordinary Brahmin!"

"What shall I do, *Baba*? I'm helpless. I have had fever for the last few days. I can't take him out to graze. I feel so ill."

"Can't you let him graze by himself?"

"Where shall I let him go, *Baba*? People haven't threshed⁷ all their paddy yet. It's still lying in the fields. The straw hasn't been gathered. Everything is burnt to cinders⁸... there isn't a blade of grass anywhere. How can I let him loose, *Baba*? He might start poking his nose into somebody's paddy or eating somebody's straw."

Tarkaratna softened a little. "But you can at least tie

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| 2. acacia | : tree from which gum is obtained (<i>Babul</i>) |
| 3. crimson | : deep red. |
| 4. indignation | : anger |
| 5. import | : (here) meaning |
| 6. flay | : take the skin or hide off (someone) |
| 7. thresh | : beat the grain out of (wheat, paddy, etc.) |
| 8. cinders | : something partly burned, and not yet ash |

him in the shade somewhere and give him a bundle of straw or two to munch. Hasn't your daughter cooked rice? Why not give him a tub of boiled rice water? Let him drink it."

Gafur made no reply. He looked helplessly at Tarakaratna and a deep sigh escaped him.

"I see; you haven't even got that much? What have you done with your share of straw? I suppose you have gone and sold it to satisfy your belly? Not saved even one bundle for the bull! How callous⁹ you are!"

At this cruel accusation Gafur seemed to lose the power of speech. "This year I was to have received my share of straw," said Gafur slowly after a moment's hesitation, "but the master kept it all on account of my last year's rent. 'Sir, you are our lord and master,' I implored, falling at his feet. 'Where am I to go if I leave your domain¹⁰? Let me have at least a little straw. There's no straw on my roof, and we have only one hut in which we two—father and daughter—live. We'll patch the roof with palm leaves and manage this rainy weather, somehow, but what will happen to our Mahesh without food?"

"Indeed! So you're fond enough of the bull to call him Mahesh! This is a joke."

But his sarcasm¹¹ did not reach Gafur. "But the master took no pity on me," he went on. "He gave me paddy to last only two months. My share of straw was added to his own stock—Mahesh didn't have even a wisp¹² of it."

"Well, don't you owe him money?" said Tarakaratna,

9. callous	: unfeeling; indifferent
10. domain	: lands under the rule of a government, ruler, etc.
11. sarcasm	: use of bitter remarks intended to hurt the feelings of someone
12. wisp	: small bundle, bunch or twist (of hay)

unmoved. "Why shouldn't you have to pay? Do you expect the landlord to support you?"

"But what am I to pay him with? We till four *bighas*¹³ of land for him, but the paddy has dried up in the fields during the droughts in the last two years. My daughter and I have not even enough to eat. Look at the hut! When it rains, I spend the night with my daughter huddled in one corner—we can't even stretch our legs. Look at Mahesh! You can count his ribs. Do lend me a bit of hay for him so that he can have something to eat for a day or two." And Gafur sank down on the ground at the Brahmin's feet.

"No, no! Move aside! Let me go home, it's getting late." Tarkaratna made a movement as though to depart, smiling. "Good God! He seems to brandish his horns at me! Will he hurt?" he cried out with fright and anger, stepping hurriedly back from the bull.

Gafur staggered to his feet. "He wants to eat a handful," he said, indicating the wet bundle of rice and fruit in Tarkaratna's hand.

"Wants to eat? Indeed! Like master, like animal. Hasn't even a bit of straw to eat and must have rice and fruit. Take him away and tie him somewhere else! What horns! He will gore¹⁴ somebody to death one of these days." Edging a little, the priest made a quick exit.

Looking away from him, Gafur silently watched Mahesh, whose two deep, brown eyes were full of pain and hunger. "Didn't even give a handful," he muttered, patting the bull's neck and back. "You are my son, Mahesh," he whispered to him. "You have grown old and served us for eight years. I can't even give you enough to eat—but you know how much I love you, don't you?"

13. bigha

: a measure of land

14. gore

: pierce; wound with the horns

Mahesh only stretched out his neck and closed his eyes with pleasure.

"Tell me," went on Gafur, "how can I keep you alive in this dreadful year? If I let you loose, you will start eating other people's paddy or munching their banana leaves. What can I do with you? You have no strength left in your body—nobody wants you. They ask me to sell you at the cattle market...." At the very idea his eyes filled with tears again. Wiping his tears on the back of his hand and looking this way and that, he fetched a tiny bunch of discoloured old straw from behind the hut. "Eat it quickly, my child, otherwise...." he said, softly, placing it before Mahesh.

"Father..."

"What is it?"

"Come and eat," answered Gafur's daughter, looking out of the door. "Why, have you again given Mahesh straw from the roof?"

He had feared as much. "It's old straw—it was rotting away," he answered, ashamed.

"I heard you pulling it, father."

"No darling, it wasn't exactly..."

"But you know, father, the wall will crumble..."

Gafur was silent. He had nothing left but this hut. Who knew better than he that unless he was careful it would not last another rainy season. And yet what good was it really?

"Wash your hands and come and eat. I have served your food," said the little girl.

"Give me the rice water; let me feed him."

"There is none, father—it has dried up in the pot."

Nearly a week had passed. Gafur was sitting in the yard, sick of body and anxious. Mahesh had not returned since the day before.

He himself was helpless. Amina had been looking for the bull everywhere from early morning. The evening shadows were already falling when she came home. "Have you heard, father? Manik Ghose has sent Mahesh to the police pen¹⁵," she said.

"Nonsense!"

"Yes, father, it's true. His servant said to me, tell your father to look for the bull at Dariapur...."

"What did he do?"

"He entered their garden, father."

Gafur made no answer.

"At the end of three days, they say, the police will sell him at the cattle market."

"Let them," answered Gafur.

Amina did not know what the "cattle market" meant. She had often noticed her father grow restless whenever it was mentioned in connection with Mahesh, but today he went out without saying another word.

Under the cover of night, Gafur secretly came round to Banshi's shop.

"Uncle, you'll have to lend me a rupee," said he, putting down a brass plate under the seat. Banshi was well acquainted with this object. In the last two years he had lent a rupee at least five times on this security. He made no objection today either.

The next morning Mahesh was seen at his usual place again. An elderly Mohammedan was examining him with

15. pen

: small enclosure for cattle, sheep, poultry etc.

very sharp eyes. Not far away, on one side, Gafur sat on the ground, all hunched up. The examination over, the old man untied a ten-rupee note from a corner of his shawl, and smoothing it again and again, said: "Here, take this. I shan't take anything off. I'm paying the full price."

Stretching his hand, Gafur took the money, but remained silent. As the two men who came with the old man were about to take the rope round the animal's neck, he suddenly stood bolt upright. "Don't touch that rope. I tell you. Be careful, I warn you!" he cried out hoarsely.

They were taken aback. "Why?" asked the old man in surprise.

"There's no why to it. He's my property—I shall not sell him; it's my pleasure," he answered in the same tone, and threw the note away.

"But you accepted the deposit yesterday," all three said in a chorus¹⁶.

"Take this back," he answered, flinging the two rupees across to them.

Gafur begged for rice water from the neighbours and fed Mahesh. Patting him on the head and horns, he whispered vague sounds of endearment to him.

It was about the middle of June. Nobody who has not looked at an Indian summer sky would realize how terrible, how unrelenting¹⁷, the heat can be. Not a trace of mercy anywhere! Today even the thought that some day this aspect of the sky will change, that it will become overcast with soft, vapor-laden clouds is impossible. It seemed as though the whole blazing sky would go on burning day after day endlessly, to the end of time.

Gafur returned home at noon. He was not used to

16. chorus

: something spoken out by many people together

17. relent

: become less severe

working as a hired labourer, and it was only four or five days since his temperature had gone down. His body was still weak and tired. He had gone out to seek work, but in vain. He had no success. Hungry, thirsty, tired, everything was dark before his eyes. "Is the food ready, Amina dear?" he called out from the courtyard.

Without answering, his daughter quietly came out and stood leaning against the wall.

"Is the food ready?" Gafur repeated without receiving an answer.

"What do you say? No? Why?"

"There's no rice, father."

"No rice? Why didn't you tell me in the morning?"

"Why, I told you last night."

"I told you last night," mimicked Gafur. "How am I to remember what you told me last night?" His anger grew more and more violent at the sound of his own voice. "Of course there's no rice!" he growled, with his face more distorted¹⁸ than ever. "What does it matter to you whether your father eats or not? But the young lady must have her three meals! In future I shall lock up the rice when I go out. Give me some water to drink—I'm dying of thirst.... So, you haven't any water, either!"

Amina remained standing with bowed head as before. Realizing that there was not even a drop of water in the house, he lost all self-control. Rushing at her, he slapped her face noisily. "Wretched girl! What do you do all day? So many people die—why don't you?"

The girl did not utter a word. She took the empty earthen pitcher and went out into the afternoon sun, quietly wiping her silent tears.

18. distort

: pull, twist, out of the usual shape

The moment she was out of sight, her father was over-whelmed with remorse¹⁹. He alone knew how he had brought up that motherless girl. He knew that this affectionate, dutiful, quiet daughter of his was not to blame. They had never had enough to eat even while their little store of rice lasted. It was impossible to eat three times a day. Nor was he unaware of the reason for the absence of water. Two of the three tanks in the village had all dried up. The little water that there was still in the private tank of Shibu Babu was not for the public. A few holes had been dug at the bottom of the other tanks, but there was such crowding and jostling for a little water that this chit of a girl could not even approach them. She stood for hours on end and, after much begging, if somebody took pity on her, she returned home with a little water. He knew all this. Perhaps there was no water today or nobody had found time to take pity on her. Something of the sort must have happened, he thought, and his own eyes, too, filled with tears.

"Gafur! Are you in?" somebody cried out from the yard. The landlord's messenger had arrived.

"Yes, I'm in. Why?" answered Gafur bitterly.

"Master has sent for you. Come."

"I haven't had any food yet. I will come later," said Gafur.

Such impudence seemed intolerable to the messenger. "It's master's order to drag you to him and give you a good thrashing," he roared, calling the man ugly names.

Gafur lost self-control for the second time. "We are nobody's slave," he replied, returning similar compliments. "We pay rent to live here. I will not go."

19. remorse

: deep, bitter regret for wrong doing

But in this world it is not only futile for the small to appeal to authority, it is dangerous as well. Fortunately the tiny voice seldom reaches big ears or who knows what might happen? When Gafur returned home from the landlord's and quietly lay down, his face and eyes were swollen. The chief cause of so much suffering was Mahesh. When Gafur left home that morning, Mahesh broke loose from his tether²⁰, and, entering the grounds of the landlord, had eaten up flowers and upset the corn drying in the sun. When finally they tried to catch him, he had hurt the landlord's youngest daughter and had escaped. This was not the first time this had happened, but Gafur was forgiven because he was poor. If he had come round, and, as on other occasions, begged for the landlord's forgiveness, he would probably have been forgiven, but instead he had claimed that he paid rent, and that he was nobody's slave. This was too much for Shibu Babu, the *Zamindar*, to swallow. Gafur had borne the beatings and tortures without protest. At home, too, he lay in a corner without a word. Hunger and thirst he had forgotten, but his heart was burning within him like the sun outside. He had kept no count of how time passed.

He was suddenly shaken out of his listlessness²¹ by a shriek of a girl. She was prostrate²² on the ground. The pitcher which she had been carrying tumbled over, and Mahesh was sucking up the water as it flowed onto the earth. Gafur was completely out of his mind. Without waiting another moment he seized his plowhead he had left the day before for repair, and with both hands struck it violently on the bent head of Mahesh. Once only Mahesh attempted to raise his head, but immediately his starving,

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|------------------|---|
| 20. tether | : rope or chain by which an animal is tied (to something) |
| 21. listlessness | : state when one is too tired to show interest or do anything |
| 22. prostrate | : lying flat on the ground |

lean body sagged to the ground. A few drops of blood from his ears rolled down. His whole body shook once or twice and then, stretching the fore and hind legs as far as they would reach, Mahesh fell dead. "What have you done, father? Our Mahesh is dead!" Amina burst out weeping.

Gafur did not move nor answer her. He remained staring without blinking at a pair of motionless, beady, black eyes.

Before two hours were out the tanners²³ living at the end of the village came crowding in and carried off Mahesh on a bamboo pole. Shuddering at the sight of the shining knives in their hands, Gafur closed his eyes but did not speak.

The neighbours informed him that the landlord had sent for Tarakaratra to ask for his advice. How would Gafur pay for the penance which the killing of a sacred animal demanded?

Gafur made no reply to these remarks, but remained squatting with his chin resting on his knees.

"Amina, dear, come, let's go," said Gafur, rousing his daughter at the dead of night.

She had fallen asleep in the yard. "Where, father?" she asked, rubbing her eyes.

"To work at the jute mill at Fulbere," said the father.

The girl looked at him incredulously. Through all his misery he had declined to go to Fulbere. "No religion, no respect, no privacy for womenfolk there," she had often heard him say.

23. tanner

: person who collects animal skins and makes them into leather

"Hurry up, my child; we have a long way to go," said Gafur.

Amina was going to collect the drinking bowl and her father's brass plate, "Leave them alone, darling. They will pay for the penance of Mahesh," said Gafur.

In the dead of night Gafur set out holding his daughter by the hand. He had nobody to call his own in the village. He had nothing to say to anybody. Crossing the yard, when he reached the acacia, he stopped stock-still and burst out crying loudly. "Allah," he said, raising his face towards the star-spangled black sky, "punish me as much as you like—Mahesh died with thirst on his lips. Nobody left even the tiniest bit of land for him to feed on. Please never forgive the landlord his sin, who never let him eat the grass nor drink the water you have given."

They set out for the jute mill.

Understanding the Story

1. Tick *all* the right answers.

The story of Gafur and his bull is set

- (i) in a feudal village.
- (ii) in a village which is drying up for want of rains.
- (iii) in a South Indian village.
- (iv) in a slum.

2. Gafur is

- (a) a small farmer who works on his own farm.
- (b) a farmer who works on a leased farm.
- (c) a farm-hand who works on others' farms for daily or weekly payment.

3. 'Drought' was written a long time ago. Certainly not in the late Seventies. Are there any clues in the story which tell you so?

4."You are my son, Mahesh," he whispered to him. "You have grown old and served us for eight years. I can't even give you enough to eat—but you know how much I love you, don't you?"

What does the quotation above suggest to you about Gafur's attitude to Mahesh? Can you cite details from the story in support of your answer?

5. Why doesn't Gafur let Mahesh graze by himself?
6. Gafur, the father, is impulsive, and loses control over himself very easily. Amina, the daughter, does not at all lose her self-control. Cite three instances from the story where this contrast is evident.
7. Why does Gafur decide to go to Fulbere?

Appreciating the Story

1. Suffering usually brings out the best as well as the worst in man. So a writer often develops the character of his hero and heroine by putting them through very difficult and painful experiences. At times this results in unrealistic stories. Does Sarat Chandra Chatterjee succeed in developing
 - (a) realistic characters who evoke the readers' admiration?
 - (b) Does the story seem authentic? Discuss
2. Find out examples of irony in the story. Here are some hints :
looking after the bull, selling the bull, killing the bull.
3. When leaving Kashipur for good, Gafur asks Amina to leave behind his drinking bowl and brass plate. What does this tell you about Gafur's attitude to the village community?

Further Reading

Chatterjee, S.C.

: *Mothers and Sons*



CAPTAIN PATCH

T.F. Powys

About the Author:

T.F. Powys was born in a distinguished literary family. He was essentially a countryman, and spent almost the whole of his life in a remote Dorset village, where all his works were written. Critics have hailed the 'superb command of life, serene yet compassionate' that marks his writings. Some of Powys's best-known novels are *Mr. Wetson's Good Wine*, *Unclay*, *Mark Only*, and *Mr. Tasker's Goods*. Powys also wrote several volumes of short stories including a collection *Rosie Plum* published after his death.

Mr Patch, a journeyman¹ tailor, who lived in his own hired house, No. 6 Cherry Street, Weyminster, looked up as well as down. In the dreams of his imagination his thoughts mounted high. He rose to glory, he commanded, and he was obeyed. In his other and ordinary life he worked industriously with needle and thread, with scissors and beeswax, with tape and machine.

As long as he had lived at Weyminster one shop had employed Mr Patch. His simple, honest face could do no one harm. To give him work was a surety that the work would be completed to everyone's satisfaction. This work was to repair, mend, clean and press naval uniforms.

He dreamed of a splendid life, of walking the quarter-deck², of drinking rich wine with distinguished guests, of

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- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| 1. journey man | : skilled workman who works for a master (not an apprentice) |
| 2. quarter-deck | : part of the upper deck of a warship usually used by naval officers |

gazing thoughtfully at Adam's Peak³, or at the photographs of young and splendid women in his state cabin.

Mr Patch hated the sea. He was of the same opinion as Saint John the Divine, that there would be no sea in Heaven. He disliked the sea so much that he would never look at it if he could avoid doing so. He always walked in the back streets to avoid seeing the sea. If there were the least wind he would creep along beside the houses for fear of being blown over. The very thought of going in a boat would make him sick. And yet, here was Mr Patch, in day-dreams and night-dreams, giving stern commands to lieutenants even more determined to do their duty than he was himself. Here was Mr Patch facing, without the least trepidation⁴ or change of countenance⁵, waves as high as mountains, through which the great ship dived like a porpoise⁶. Here he was, ordering a large town to be shelled to little pieces, and that only because the Mayor did not show a proper respect to the flag.

But the other Mr Patch, who lived within these mad dreams, asked but little for himself in the way of grandeur. He liked his meals properly laid out, and so he wished to marry a housemaid. He wanted a child or two, to walk out with his wife and himself upon a Sunday in the direction of the greenfields, there to watch the cows for a little, and return to Cherry Street, contented and hungry.

Everyone had a good word to say for Mr Patch, and, except, in his own excited imagination, he was the gentlest man alive.

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- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 3. Adam's Peak | : a mountain peak in Sri Lanka |
| 4. trepidation | : alarm, fear |
| 5. countenance | : face, appearance |
| 6. porpoise | : a sea animal (about 5 feet long) like a small whale |

Did he happen to⁷ get into the way of a child playing he would apologize most humbly. He was afraid of the young women, as every wise man is here upon earth; and did any girl say a word out of place in his hearing, he would bid her goodbye for ever. No one was better made than Mr Patch for the pleasant happiness of a lifelong monotony⁸; such contentedness he would show and such modest joy, were he married to a woman that he loved.

But alas! away went such blessedness when he entered his work-room to take up a uniform to mend. Then the wildest glory of greatness came upon him, that coloured all his hours and made his heart beat with pride and courage.

For a long while Mr Patch bore his dreams in silence; the smoke was there but the fire had not come.

One day he broke the bonds. He had just completed a few necessary repairs upon a captain's uniform that had come from the shop with a request for very careful workmanship.

It was a fine morning in May when Mr Patch finished the work, and the sun had painted all the town with blue and yellow. The fleet was in port, and Mr Patch, with trembling hands, put on the captain's uniform.

He looked at himself in the glass. What pride, what glory, did he view! What child of four putting on a new party-frock could have been so delighted! Mr Patch was triumphant; his old self of the needle and thread was gone; he was a new man. He assumed at once the part of a captain with the greatest ease. He stepped up and down

7. Did he happen to : If he happened to...

8. monotony : absence of change and variety, dullness

the room most finely. He took a pair of kid gloves⁹ in his left hand, and walked out by the back door into the street.

Once in the street, he took the nearest turning to the esplanade;¹⁰ to view the sea was proper to his new style of being. There he walked with a determined stride, as though he had trod always upon washed boards¹¹. From one end to the other he went with the utmost assurance. Many sailors were on shore, and every one of them saluted respectfully.

Mr Patch became intoxicated with joy. It was then that a foolish idea came to him to get nearer the sea, which, in the madness of his pride, appeared now to be his natural element. The tide was low; descending the steps, he walked in the same superior manner upon the wet sands.

Now and again he looked calmly at the sea, and sometimes nodded as if to say that he had spent all his life upon its surly¹² or smiling waters.

And then an unfortunate thing happened.

A cruiser¹³ was practising speed tests in the bay. During one of these tests the wash of the ship caused a large wave to run shorewards.

Captain Patch did not see it coming. Indeed, had the wave been as high as a mountain, he would have given no heed to it, until as it happened now, he was covered with salt water.

Mr Patch retired in deep dudgeon,¹⁴ and for a while his grand dreams were over. . . .

9. kid glove	: soft glove made of the fine skin of small goat
10. esplanade	: level area of ground by the sea
11. washed boards	: deck of a ship
12. surly	: bad-tempered, unfriendly
13. cruiser	: fast warship
14. in deep (high) dudgeon	: offended, indignant

All high things—honesty, goodness, and integrity—are easy to lay. A few drops of disturbing rain, a little sickness, will sweep them away completely, they will be as though they never had been, and the man will be as others are, full of fret and trouble, making the few years of his misery a lasting contempt. But folly and pride belong to continuity. Put them deep in the earth, up they rise in a moment, always ready to show a knavish¹⁵ light, to debase the goodness of an honest man.

For some reason the shop that employed Mr Patch forgot to ask for the officer's suit; it might have been that the captain, who had since become an admiral, had not troubled to send for it, so that the uniform which had been so sadly splashed by the salt water, and so well cleaned by Mr Patch, was never inquired for. To whom then did it belong if not to Captain Patch?

To dress himself once more in all the splendour of high rank was now his constant wish, and might he not walk along the front again?

But he feared the sea, which, he thought, knew him for a cheat, and to walk upon the esplanade with the waves so near to him 'appeared likely,' thought Mr Patch, 'to lead to another disappointment.' How could he be sure that a larger wave might not come? It was unlikely that his uniform would save him from drowning. But was there no other path to show his grandeur?

One morning when on his way to take some clothes to the shop, Mr Patch passed a taxi-cab. Inside the cab there was a naval officer in uniform—a captain. He sat in the car, in distinguished silence, his lips tightly pressed together. Did he wave his hand it would be to salute the King.

15. knavish

: deceitful

Though a moment before Mr Patch was thinking that a nurserymaid would be very suitable for a wife if the housemaids were coy, now only a lady—born of a county family, with all the attributes of a real lady—would do for him.

His mind soared high: a fine thought that opened out a world of honour came into his head. All country people, he knew, acknowledge and bow to greatness. He remembered how he had once seen a tenant of Lord Bullman's pull his forelock¹⁶ and make a low Conge¹⁷ when his landlord condescended to speak to him. With his uniform upon him, what lord could be greater than Captain Patch? He would save his money until he had amassed five pounds, then he would hire a cab and drive to a country inn.

He chose Madder, far in the country and ten miles from Weyminster. No one there would know that His Majesty's officers do not usually go about in uniform. 'And, of course,' thought Mr Patch, 'they have no need to show their finery, for the fox knew the ass in the lion's skin by his voice.'

As soon as the five pounds were saved, Captain Patch walked hurriedly to within twenty yards of the naval landing-place near to the pier,¹⁸ and then, after retiring for a few moments out of sight, appeared suddenly again as if he had just come up the steps from a motor boat, and shouted for a cab.

In half an hour he drove into the inn-yard of the 'Soldier's Return' at Madder.

16. forelock : lock of hair growing just above the forehead.

17. Conge : formal permission to depart

18. pier : structure of wood, iron, etc. built out into the sea as a landing stage

There he was welcomed in a proper manner, for he called at once for the best the house could give. Soon Shepherd Poose came in with his crook¹⁹ in his hand, in order to see who it was that had driven in so grandly. The Captain bid him drink.

Where one bumble-bee finds honey others will come. In a little while the house was full.

The Captain sat at the head of the table. He had put the money that he had to spend in his left-hand pocket; in his right was the fare for the cab.

As soon as the company were merry, the Captain began to tell his stories.

They were not of women, for Captain Patch had the greatest respect for all girls, and no tale that was in the least unseemly ever passed his lips. The usual tavern²⁰ lies in carnal²¹ matters he never told, but he lied splendidly of the sea. He told of the ships that he had commanded, of the distance his guns would carry, and how certain their aim. He told of the enormous waves he had seen, of sea-serpents a mile long, and other terrible monsters of the deep. Of islands that rose up suddenly out of the waters, and of mermaids that, with his own eyes, he had seen swimming, upon moonlit nights, around the ship.

Captain Patch stopped suddenly in the middle of a story; his left-hand pocket was empty. He called the driver in a hurry, and departed in a blaze of white light.

There is no glory like the glory of illusion. A fine actor is more than his part; he is Truth itself. When a thing really is itself—as far as we can call it so—a dullness envelops it, a sameness. Then, as reality is there, the thing

19. crook	: a shepherd's stick, with a rounded hook at one end
20. tavern	: inn, public house where food and drink are served
21. carnal	: of the flesh, sensual

is but an ordinary matter—a picture in a great book, that is passed over and forgotten.

At Madder Inn Captain Patch acted his part without a mistake. He arrived suddenly and vanished in a moment. He never visited Madder without money in his pocket.

When the car approached Madder a kind of telepathy²² happened. Everyone knew that the Captain was come. In a moment in the twinkling of an eye, the house was full. In less time than it takes to speak of it, the church bells were rung, and old Mr Johnson, who whatever time you called was asleep in his chair, woke with a start and hurried to the inn. When the drink was on the table the landlord made a speech in praise of Captain Patch.

One of the Captain's visits to Madder chanced to happen when a young lady was staying in the village. Her name was Miss Straw, and she was wont²³ to hire a Madder cottage for a month in the summer. She was a very genteel young person, the daughter—as she modestly told the postmistress—of a Suffolk Squire.²⁴

Miss Straw was known to be rich, for she paid for all she bought, and even gave away money to old people and to children! That she was a lady all might know by the way she held her little velvet bag when she went to church, and by the extra care with which she watched the sweeping of her room.

Captain Patch was making his fourth visit to Madder when Miss Straw happened to sprain her ankle as she climbed into the Weyminster road over a stile. She had walked that way by the footpath.

22. telepathy

: (here) sending or receiving someone's thoughts and feelings without the normal use of the senses

23. be wont to

: be used to

24. squire

: a big land owner

Captain Patch—full of gallantry²⁵ as every sailor should be—stopped the car and offered her a lift. No two people could have got on better nor could have had more to say to one another. She loved the sea and all seafaring ways, while the Captain showed a vast interest in fox-hunting, a noble sport that she indulged in.

As soon as the car reached Madder Green, the Church bells rang a wedding peal. The lady blushed—she liked those sounds—and she invited Captain Patch into her cottage.

Was ever a village so gulled?²⁶ Mr Johnson, who was woken up, returned to his chair in a very bad humour. Not a drop of drink was given away that evening. The Captain remained at Miss Straw's cottage until midnight, and then drove soberly home. . . .

A wedding at Madder is often a fine treat, for when the parties have money, it is a feast day for all, and so when the Captain married Miss Straw, everyone thought that the good times of his visits were come again.

There was no need upon that joyful day that the wedding-bells should wake old Johnson from his slumbers. He roused himself in joyful expectation, and waited at the inn door at six o'clock in the morning....

Half an hour is a short space of time, and when, dotted with coloured paper, Captain and Mrs. Patch stepped into the car, the good man knew that, those short thirty minutes over, his lovely bride must know him as a rogue, a liar and a knave.

He had made the little house in Cherry Street as comfortable as his means would allow. There were china dogs over the mantelpiece, good linen, suitable furniture.

25. gallantry

: devotion and attention to ladies and their needs

26. gull (v)

: cheat, deceive

and a new cooking-stove, but how could such mean things please a fox-hunting lady from Suffolk?

They had gone but a little way when the lady sighed.

‘Will the sea be very rough when we go on board your ship tonight, dear?’ she asked.

Captain Patch shook his head.

‘You won’t wish to ride hunting every day?’ he asked timidly.

‘I would much rather not,’ she said boldly. ‘but need I ever go to sea?’

‘Oh no,’ he cried fervently, ‘never, if I can help it.’

‘You have given it up?’ she exclaimed happily.

‘Oh yes,’ he said. ‘I live on shore now—I do needle-work.’

‘And I love housework,’ she cried.

They began to understand one another.

‘I have always been a housemaid,’ she said.

He kissed her thankfully.

‘I am Mr Patch, tailor,’ he observed proudly.

And that same night the captain’s uniform was kicked into the dustbin.

(Slightly abridged)

Understanding the Story

Say whether True or False.

- (i) Mr Patch was a skilled tailor.
- (ii) Mr Patch was employed by the navy to mend uniforms.
- (iii) Mr Patch enjoyed mending uniforms.
- (iv) Mr Patch loved the sea.

- (v) Mr Patch used to dream very often that he was a brilliant naval officer.
- (vi) In his dreams Mr Patch commanded ships and led attacks.
- (vii) In his ordinary life Mr Patch was very ambitious.
- (viii) Mr Patch was rather timid and gentle.
- (ix) Work on naval uniforms usually started his dreams.
- (x) When he put on a captain's uniform, Mr Patch's behaviour changed dramatically.
- (xi) Mr Patch played the role of a naval captain rather well.
- (xii) Mr Patch's first trip to the seashore in a captain's uniform ended unhappily because the sailors there easily saw through his game.
- (xiii) Mr Patch failed to impress the people at Madder's Inn.
- (xiv) Mr Patch told the villagers of Madder many imaginary naval stories in which he was the hero.
- (xv) Miss Straw was an aristocratic lady.
- (xvi) The wedding between Mr Patch and Miss Straw was one of the most memorable events at Madder Church.
- (xvii) Mr Patch and Miss Straw found out each other's play-acting soon after the wedding.
- (xviii) Both Mr Patch and Miss Straw got the kind of spouse they had been looking for.

Appreciating the Story

1. Which of the following contribute to the humour of the story? Comment on each.
 - (a) the disparity between what Mr Patch is in real life and what he is in his imagination.
 - (b) the nature of Mr Patch's work
 - (c) the names of the characters and places used in the story
 - (d) Mr Patch's success in making the people at Madder Inn believe that he is a naval captain
 - (e) Miss Straw's pretence that matches Mr Patch's
 - (f) Mr Patch's hatred for the sea
 - (g) Mr Patch's extraordinary gentleness in real life (the ways it found expression in).
2. One of the most humorous 'episodes' in the story is the shedding of pretence by both Mr Patch and Miss Straw soon after their wedding. Is the revelation of the real self painful to either of them? Is the revelation gradual or sudden? Why does the

shedding of pretence bring about relief and happiness for both? What is the significance of Mr Patch's kicking the captain's uniform into the dustbin?

3. The story spins round the two selves of Mr Patch. The contrast between the two is indeed very striking. Mr Patch's imagination stimulated by the naval uniform exceeds all limits of fantasy. He actually plays the role of the captain, and makes many people, including Miss Straw, believe that he is a captain. He is rid of his wild imagination when, soon after the wedding, Miss Straw reveals that she has been posing as a lady.

Clearly there is a great deal of exaggeration in the story and that is the main source of humour. Do you think the author is portraying you and me in rather bold colours? Is there a suggestion that we are all lighter versions of Mr Patch and Miss Straw? Is there any 'sting' in the story? Or is it just a funny story?

4. Twice in the story (i.e. the paragraph beginning "All high things—honesty, goodness...", and the one beginning "There is no glory like the glory of illusion.") does the author stop story-telling and talk about life in general. Do these add to or take away from the effect of the story?

Further Reading

Powys, T.F.

: *Rosie Plum*

GOING INTO EXILE

Liam O'Flaherty

About the Author:

Liam O'Flaherty (b. 1897), Irish by birth, has written novels, plays, essays and short stories. In his stories one finds a vivid and gripping portrayal of the Irish folk and their life.

Patrick Feeney's cabin¹ was crowded with people. In the large kitchen men, women, and children lined the walls, sitting on forms², chairs, stools, and on one another's knees. On the cement floor three couples were dancing a jig and raising a quantity of dust, which was, however, soon sucked up the chimney by the huge turf fire that blazed on the hearth³. The only clear space in the kitchen was the corner to the left of the fireplace, where Pat Mullaney sat on a yellow chair, his red face contorting⁴ as he played a tattered old accordion. Outside, a starry June sky was visible and, beneath the sky, shadowy grey crags⁵ and misty, whitish fields lay motionless, still, and sombre. There was a deep, calm silence outside the cabin. Within the cabin, in spite of the music and dancing in the kitchen and the singing in the little room to the left, where Patrick Feeney's eldest son Michael sat on the bed with three other young men, there was a haunting melancholy⁶ in the air.

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- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 1. cabin | small, usually roughly made house (e.g. of logs) |
| 2. form | : long seat without a back |
| 3. hearth | : floor of a fireplace |
| 4. contort | : twist out the usual shape or appearance |
| 5. crag | : high, steep, sharp mass of rock |
| 6. melancholy | : sadness |

The people were dancing, laughing, and singing with a certain forced and boisterous gaiety that failed to hide from them the real cause of their being there. For the dance was on account of Patrick Feeney's two children, Mary and Michael, who were going to the United States on the following morning.

Feeney himself, a black-bearded, red-faced, middle-aged peasant, wandered restlessly about the kitchen, urging the people to sing and dance, while his mind was in agony all the time, thinking that on the following day he would lose his eldest two children, never to see them again perhaps. He kept talking to everybody about amusing things, shouted at the dancers, and behaved in a boisterous and abandoned manner. But every now and then he had to leave the kitchen, under the pretence⁷ of going to the pigsty to look at a young pig that was supposed to be ill. He would stand, however, upright against his gable⁸ and look gloomily at some star or other, while his mind struggled with vague and peculiar ideas that wandered about in it. He couldn't read his own thoughts, but a lump always came up his throat, and he shivered, although the night was warm.

And then he would go back to the cabin again and begin to urge on the dance, laughing, shouting, and stamping on the floor.

Towards dawn, when the floor was crowded with couples, arranged in fours, stamping on the floor and going to and fro, Feeney was going out to the gable when his son Michael followed him out. The two of them walked in silence, side by side. Michael was taller than his father and not so thickly built, but the shabby blue serge⁹

7. pretence : (here) false excuse

8. gable : three-cornered part of an outside wall between sloping roofs

9. serge : woollen cloth

suit that he had bought for going to America was too narrow for his broad shoulders and the coat was too wide round the waist. During his twenty-one years of life he had never worn anything other than the homespun clothes of Inverara, and the shop-made clothes appeared as strange to him and as uncomfortable as a dress suit worn by a man working in a sewer. His face was flushed a bright red and his blue eyes shone with excitement. Now and again he wiped the perspiration from his forehead with the lining of his grey tweed cap.

At last Patrick Feeney reached his usual position at the gable end. He halted, balanced himself on his heels, coughed and said, 'It's going to be a warm day.' The son came up beside him, folded his arms, and leaned his right shoulder against the gable.

'It was kind of Uncle Ned to lend the money for the dance, father,' he said. 'I'd hate to think that we'd have to go without something or other, just the same as everybody else has. I'll send you that money the very first money I earn, father.... even before I pay Aunt Mary for my passage money. I shall have all that money paid off in four months, and then I'll have some more money to send you by Christmas.'

And Michael felt very strong and manly recounting what he was going to do when he got to Boston, Massachusetts. He told himself that with his great strength he would earn a great deal of money. Conscious of his youth and his strength and lusting for adventurous life, for the moment he forgot the ache in his heart that the thought of leaving his father inspired in him.

The father was silent for some time. He was looking at the sky, thinking of nothing. At last he sighed as a memory struck him.

'What is it?' said the son. 'Don't weaken, for God's sake. You will only make it hard for me.'

'Fooh!' said the father suddenly with pretended gruffness. 'Who is weakening? I'm afraid that your new clothes make you impudent.¹¹' Then he was silent for a minute and continued in a low voice:

'I was thinking of that potato field you sowed alone last spring the time I had the influenza. I never set eyes on the man that could do it better. It's a cruel world that takes you away from the land that God made you for.'

'Oh, what are you talking about, father?' said Michael irritably. 'Sure what did anybody ever get out of the land but poverty and hard work and potatoes and salt?'

'Ah yes,' said the father with a sigh, 'but it's your own, the land, and over there'—he waved his hand at the western sky—'you'll be giving your sweat to some other man's land, or what's equal to it.'

'Indeed,' muttered Michael, looking at the ground with a melancholy expression in his eyes, 'it's poor encouragement you are giving me.'

They stood in silence for a full five minutes. Each hungered to embrace the other, to cry, to beat the air, to scream with excess of sorrow. But they stood silent and sombre, like nature about them, hugging their woe. Then they went back into the cabin. Michael went into the little room to the left of the kitchen, to the three young men who fished in the same curragh¹² with him and were his bosom friends. The father walked into the large bedroom to the right of the kitchen.

The large bedroom was also crowded with people. A large table was laid for tea in the centre of the room and

10. gruffness

: roughness (of a person's voice, behaviour)

11. impudent

: shamelessly rude

12. curragh

: small rounded boat used in Wales, Ireland, and parts of western England

about a dozen young men were sitting at it, drinking tea and eating buttered raisin¹³ cake. Mrs Feeney was bustling about the table, serving the food and urging them to eat. Her eldest daughter Mary, who was going to the United States that day, was sitting on the edge of the bed with several other young women. The bed was a large one and the young women were huddled together on it. So that there must have been a dozen of them there. They were Mary Feeney's particular friends, and they stayed with her in that uncomfortable position just to show how much they liked her. It was a custom.

Mary herself sat on the edge of the bed with her legs dangling. She was a pretty, dark-haired girl of nineteen, with dimpled, plump, red cheeks and ruminative¹⁴ brown eyes. Her body was plump, soft, well-moulded. She seemed to have been born to be fondled and admired in luxurious surroundings instead of having been born a peasant's daughter, who had to go to the United States that day to work as a servant or may be in a factory.

And as she sat on the edge of the bed crushing her little handkerchief between her palms, she kept thinking feverishly of the United States, at one moment with fear and loathing, at the next with desire and longing. Unlike her brother she did not think of the work she was going to do or the money that she was going to earn. Other things troubled her, things of which she was half ashamed, half afraid, thoughts of love and of foreign men and of clothes and of houses where there were more than three rooms and where people ate meat every day. She was fond of life.

'Oh!' said an old peasant who sat at the table with a saucer full of tea in his hand, 'Oho! indeed, but it's a

13. raisin : dried sweet grape (used in cakes)

14. ruminative : inclined to meditate

disgrace to the island of Inverara to let such a beautiful woman as your daughter go away, Mrs Feeney. If I were a young man, I'll be flayed alive if I'd let her go.'

'Oh, well, God is good,' said Mrs Feeney, wiping her lips with the tip of her apron. 'What will be must be, and sure there is hope from the sea, but there is no hope from the grave. It is sad and the poor have to suffer, but....' Mrs Feeney stopped suddenly, aware that her words meant nothing whatsoever. Like her husband she was unable to think intelligibly¹⁵ about her two children going away. Whenever the reality of their going away, may be forever, into a vast unknown world, came to her mind, it seemed that a thin bar of some hard metal pierced through her head. So that almost immediately she became stupidly conscious of the pain caused by the imaginary bar of metal and she forgot the dread prospect of her children going away. But her mind grappled with the preparation of food, with the entertaining of her guests, with the numerous little things that have to be done in a house where there is a party and which only a woman can do properly. These little things, in a manner, saved her, for the moment at least, from bursting into tears whenever she looked at her daughter and whenever she thought of her son, whom she loved most of all her children. So she laughed down in her breast a funny laugh that made her heave, and said with a shrug of her shoulders sideways, 'A person begins to talk, and then a person says foolish things.'

'That's true,' said the old peasant, noisily pouring more tea from his cup to his saucer.

But Mary knew by her mother laughing that way that she was very near being hysterical. She always laughed that way before she had one of her fits of hysterics. Mary

15. intelligibly : clearly

became acutely conscious of the swelling that came now and again in her legs and caused her to have hysterics and would one day cause her death. And she was stricken with horror at the thought of leaving her mother and at the selfishness of her thoughts. She had never been prone to thinking of anything important; but now, somehow for a moment, she had a glimpse of her mother's life that made her shiver and hate herself as a cruel, heartless, lazy, selfish wretch. Her mother's life loomed up before her eyes, a life of continual¹⁶ misery and suffering, hard work, birth pangs, sickness, and again hard work and hunger and anxiety. A little mist came before her eyes and she jumped down from the bed.

'Sit down for a while, mother,' she whispered. 'I'll look after the table.'

'No, no,' murmured the mother with a shake of her whole body. 'I'm not a bit tired. Sit down, my treasure. You have a long way to travel today.'

And Mary sighed and went back to the bed again.

At last somebody said: 'It's broad daylight.' And immediately everybody looked out and said: 'So it is and may God be praised.' The stars were growing dim. Another day had arrived and even as the people looked at it, yawned and began to search for their hats, caps, and shawls preparing to go home, the day grew and spread its light and made things move and give voice. They said good-bye and began to stream out from Feeney's cabin. They were going to their homes to see to the morning's work before going to Kilmurrage to see the emigrants¹⁷

16. continual : going on all the time without stopping, or with only short breaks

17. emigrant : a person who goes away from one's own country to another to settle there

off on the steamer to the mainland¹⁸. Soon the cabin was empty except for the family.

All the family gathered into the kitchen and stood about for some minutes talking sleepily of the dance and of the people who had been present. Mrs Feeney tried to persuade everybody to go to bed, but everybody refused. It was four o'clock and Michael and Mary would have to set out for Kilmurragh at nine. So tea was made and they all sat about for an hour drinking it and eating raisin cake and talking. They only talked of the dance and of the people who had been present.

There were eight of them there, the father, and the mother and six children. Apart from Mary and Michael there was Thomas, a thin boy of twelve, who was the youngest child, Bridget, a girl of fourteen and then the twins Julia and Margaret, both of them great workers and very obedient to their mother. When they had just finished a third large pot of tea, suddenly the mother hastily gulped down the remainder of the tea in her cup, dropped the cup with a clatter to her saucer, and sobbed once through her nose.

'Now mother,' said Michael sternly, 'what's the good of this work?'

'No, you are right, my pulse,' she replied quietly 'only I was just thinking how nice it is to sit here surrounded by all my children, all my little birds in my nest, and then two of them going to fly away made me sad.' And she laughed, pretending to treat it as a foolish joke.

'Oh, that be damned for a story,' said the father, wiping his mouth on his sleeve; 'there's work to be done. You Julia, go and get the horse. Margaret, you milk the cow and see that you give enough milk to the calf this

18. mainland

: country, continent

morning.' And he ordered everybody about as if it were an ordinary day of work.

But Michael and Mary had nothing to do and they sat about miserably conscious that they had cut adrift from the routine of their home life. They no longer had any place in it. In a few hours they would be homeless wanderers. Now that they were cut adrift from it, the poverty and sordidness¹⁹ of their home life appeared to them under the aspect²⁰ of comfort and plenty.

So the morning passed until breakfast time at seven o'clock. The family was gathered together again and the meal passed in dead silence. Drowsy after the sleepless night and conscious that parting would come in a few hours, nobody wanted to talk. Everybody had an egg for breakfast in honour of the occasion.

Then the breakfast was cleared away. The father went to put the creels²¹ on the mare so as to take the luggage into Kilmurrage. Michael and Mary got the luggage ready and began to get dressed. The mother and the other children tidied up the house. People from the village began to come into the kitchen, as was customary, in order to accompany the emigrants from their home to Kilmurrage.

At last everything was ready. Mrs Feeney had exhausted all excuses for moving about, engaged on trivial tasks. She had to go into the big bedroom where Mary was putting on a new hat. The mother sat on a chair by the window, her face contorting on account of the flood of tears she was keeping back. Michael moved about the room uneasily, his two hands knotting a big red handkerchief behind his back. Mary twisted about in front of the

19. sordidness : shabby, wretched, comfortless condition

20. aspect : (here) appearance

21. creel : a fisherman's basket for carrying fish

mirror that hung over the black wooden mantelpiece²². She was spending a long time with the hat. It was the first one she had ever worn, but it fitted her beautifully, and it was in excellent taste.

But the mother, looking at her beautiful daughter, got suddenly enraged with.... She didn't know with what she got enraged. But for the moment she hated her daughter's beauty, and she remembered all the anguish of giving birth to her and nursing her and toiling for her, for no other purpose than to lose her now and let her go away. A cloud of mad jealousy and hatred against this impersonal beauty that she saw in her daughter almost suffocated the mother, and she stretched out her hands in front of her unconsciously and then just as suddenly her anger vanished like a puff of smoke and she burst into wild tears, wailing: 'My children, oh, my children, far over the sea you will be carried from me, your mother.' And she began to rock herself and she threw her apron over her head.

Immediately the cabin was full of the sound of bitter wailing. A dismal ²³ cry rose from the women gathered in the kitchen. 'Far over the sea they will be carried,' began woman after woman, and they all rocked themselves and hid their heads in their aprons.

In the bedroom the son and daughter, on their knees, clung to their mother who held their heads between her hands and rained kisses on both heads ravenously. After the first wave of tears she had stopped weeping. The tears still ran down her cheeks, but her eyes gleamed and they were dry. There was a fierce look in them as she searched all over the heads of her two children with them, with her brows contracted, searching with a fierce terror-stricken

22. mantelpiece : structure of wood, marble, etc, above and around a fireplace

23. dismal : sad, gloomy, miserable

expression, as if by the intensity of her stare she hoped to keep a living photograph of them before her mind. The two children were sobbing freely. They must have stayed that way a quarter of an hour.

Then the father came into the room, dressed in his best clothes. He held his soft black felt hat in one hand and in the other hand he had a bottle of holy water. He coughed and said in a weak gentle voice that was strange to him, as he touched his son: 'Come now, it is time'.

Mary and Michael got to their feet. The father sprinkled them with holy water and they crossed themselves. Then, without looking at their mother, who lay in the chair with her hands clasped on her lap, looking at the ground in a silent, tearless stupor²⁴, they left the room. Each hurriedly kissed little Thomas, who was not going to Kilmurragh, and then hand in hand, they left the house. As Michael was going out of the door he picked a piece of loose whitewash from the wall and put it in his pocket. The people filed out after them, down the yard and on to the road, like a funeral procession. The mother was left in the house with little Thomas and two old peasant women from the village. Nobody spoke in the cabin for a long time.

Then the mother rose and came into the kitchen. She looked at the two women, at her little son, and at the hearth, as if she were looking for something she had lost. Then she threw her hands into the air and ran out into the yard.

'Come back,' she screamed; 'come back to me.'

She looked wildly down the road with dilated nostrils, her bosom heaving. But there was nobody in sight. Nobody replied. The crooked stretch of limestone road,

24. stupor

: (here) almost unconscious condition caused by shock

surrounded by grey crags that were scorched by the sun, ended in a hill and then dropped out of sight. The hot June day was silent. Listening foolishly for an answering cry, the mother imagined she could hear the crags simmering²⁵ under the hot rays of the sun.

The two old women led her back into the kitchen.

'There is nothing that time will not cure,' said one.

'Yes. Time and patience,' said the other.

(Slightly abridged)

Understanding the Story

- 1 Say whether the following statements are *True* or *False* according to the story: —
 - (i) Dances and parties were a usual affair at the Feeneys' cabin.
 - (ii) Patrick Feeney was of the feeling that Michael had become disrespectfully rude even before earning money in a foreign land.
 - (iii) Michael's father did not like the idea of his son toiling for another man's prosperity.
 - (iv) Michael and Mary were twins.
 - (v) The thought that their children were going away to a far-off land upset the Feeneys very much.
 - (vi) Michael and Mary were going away to a place called Kilmurragh to find employment.
 - (vii) Patrick Feeney had to spend all his savings to pay for Michael and Mary's travel.
2. Were the Feeneys well-to-do people? (Quote lines from the text in support of your answer).
3. Why do you think Michael and Mary were going abroad to find jobs when they had their own land? Which lines in the text give you the answer?

25. simmer

: almost boil

4. 'Oh, well, God is good,' said Mrs Feeney, wiping her lips with the tip of her apron. "What will be must be, and sure there is hope from the sea....'
What do you think Mrs. Feeney meant when she said this? What made her speak like this?
5. Why does the author say:—
'In a few hours they (Mary and Michael) would be homeless wanderers.'?
6. After the guests left, the family gathered into the kitchen and talked only of the dance and the people who came for the dance. Why? (Is there something unnatural about it?)
7. 'Then, without looking at their mother, who lay in the chair with her hands clasped on her lap, looking at the ground in a silent, tearless stupor, they left the room.'
Why do you think Michael and Mary did not bid their mother goodbye when they left?
8. 'There is nothing that time will not cure,' said one. 'Yes. Time and patience,' said the other. What is the significance of these lines spoken by the two old women in the story?
9. 'As Michael was going out of the door, he picked up a piece of loose whitewash from the wall and put it in his pocket.' What could be the reason for this?

Appreciating the story

1. Read carefully about the way Michael and Mary look forward to their voyage to a foreign country. What can you gather from this about their devotion to their family and their sense of responsibility? Who do you think is more concerned about the welfare of the family? Quote the relevant lines from the text to support your answer.
2. Is there a marked difference between Patrick Feeney's and Mrs Feeney's attitudes to the harsh reality facing them? Who is likely to face it better? Justify your answer with relevant illustrations from the text.
3. 'Pathetic fallacy' is a phrase which refers to the description of a lifeless object as though it had human capacities and feelings. It is

applied to the extraordinary or false appearances observed by persons when they are under the influence of strong emotions. Many writers employ this technique to heighten the impact of their writing. For example, in Kalidasa's famous play, *Shakuntala*, the poet talks about the trees, the creepers, and the flowers bidding a tearful farewell to Shakuntala who is going away to join her husband. This is an example of 'Pathetic fallacy'.

Do you think O'Flaherty has employed this technique in the story? Read the text carefully and quote the relevant lines in support of your answer.

4. 'Exile' means banishment from one's home or country especially as a punishment. Keeping this in mind, do you think the title of the story is appropriate? Why do you think the writer has given his story the title 'Going into Exile'?

Further Reading

Liam O'Flaherty

: 'The Fairy Goose', 'Three Lambs' in *Modern Irish Short Stories* selected by Frank O'Connor.

L.A.C. Strong.

: 'Prongs' in the same collection.

“GOD IS NEAR”

James Herriot

About the Author:

James Herriot is the pseudonym of a vet. He was born in Glasgow; but, except during war-time service in the Royal Air Force, has practised all his life in Yorkshire. Herriot's stories are a rich treat for all animal-lovers. Highly realistic, humorous, and touching, they capture a veterinary surgeon's life from many perspectives. Books by James Herriot include *If Only They Could Talk*, *It Shouldn't Happen to a Vet*, *Let Sleeping Vets lie*, *Vet in Harness* and *Vets might fly*. “God is Near” is taken from the collection *It Shouldn't Happen to a Vet*.

The card dangled above the old lady's bed. It read ‘God is Near’ but it wasn't like the usual religious text. It didn't have a frame or ornate¹ printing. It was just a strip of cardboard about eight inches long with plain lettering which might have said ‘No smoking’ or ‘Exit’ and it was looped carelessly over an old gas bracket² so that Miss Stubbs from where she lay could look up at it and read ‘God is Near’ in square black capitals.

There wasn't much more Miss Stubbs could see; perhaps a few feet of hedge through the frayed curtains but mainly it was just the cluttered³ little room which had been her world for so many years.

The room was on the ground floor and in the front of the cottage. As I came up through the wilderness which had once been a garden I could see the dogs watching me

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|----------------|--|
| 1. ornate | : richly ornamented |
| 2. gas bracket | : support on a wall for a gas or electric lamp |
| 3. cluttered | : untidy |

from the old lady's bed. And when I knocked on the door the place almost erupted with their barking. It was always like this. I had been visiting regularly for over a year and the pattern never changed; the furious barking, then Mrs Broadwith who looked after Miss Stubbs would push all the animals but my patient into the back kitchen and open the door and I would go in and see Miss Stubbs in the corner in her bed with the card hanging over it.

She had been there for a long time and would never get up again. But she never mentioned her illness and pain to me; all her concern was for her three dogs and two cats.

Today it was old Prince and I was worried about him. With the kind of heart disease he had he should have been dead long ago. He was waiting for me as I came in, pleased as ever to see me, his long, fringed tail waving gently.

'I thought I'd best give you a ring, Mr Herriot', Mrs Broadwith said. She was a comfortable, elderly widow with a square, ruddy⁴ face contrasting sharply with the pinched features on the pillow. 'He's been coughing right bad this week and this morning he was a bit staggers. Still eats well, though.'

'I bet he does.' I ran my hands over the rolls of fat on the ribs. 'It would take something really drastic to put old Prince off his grub'⁵

Miss Stubbs laughed from the bed and the old dog, his mouth wide, eyes dancing, seemed to be joining in the joke. I put my stethoscope over his heart and listened, knowing well what I was going to hear. They say the heart is supposed to go 'Lub-dup, lub-dup,' but Prince's went 'swish-swoosh, swish-swoosh.' There seemed to be nearly

4. ruddy : red. as showing good health
5. grub : (slang for) food

as much blood leaking back as was being pumped into the circulatory system. And another thing. the 'swish-swoosh' was a good bit faster than last time.

Gloomily I moved the stethoscope over the rest of the chest. The old dog stood very erect and proud, his tail still waving slowly. He always took it as a tremendous compliment when I examined him and there was no doubt he was enjoying himself now. Fortunately his was not a very painful ailment.

Straightening up, I patted his head and he responded immediately by trying to put his paws on my chest. He didn't quite make it and even that slight exertion started his ribs heaving and his tongue lolling. I gave him a couple of injections which he accepted with apparent pleasure as part of the game.

'I hope that will steady his heart and breathing, Miss Stubbs. You'll find he'll be a bit dopey⁶ for the rest of the day and that will help, too. Carry on with the tablets and I'm going to leave you some more medicine for his bronchitis.'

The next stage of the visit began now as Mrs. Broadwith brought in a cup of tea and the rest of the animals were let out of the kitchen. There were Ben and Sally and they started a deafening barking contest with Prince. They were closely followed by the cats, Arthur and Susie, who stalked in gracefully and began to rub themselves against my trouser legs.

It was the usual scenario⁷ for the many cups of tea I had drunk with Miss Stubbs under the little card which dangled above her bed.

6. dopey : (slang for) half asleep (as if) drugged.

7. scenario : (here) setting

'How are you today?' I asked.

'Oh, much better,' she replied and immediately, as always, changed the subject.

Mostly she liked to talk about her pets and the ones she had known right back to her girlhood. She spoke a lot too, about the days when her family were alive. She loved to describe the escapades⁸ of her three brothers and today she showed me a photograph which Mrs Broadwith had found at the bottom of a drawer.

'My word, they look really bright lads, Miss Stubbs,' I said.

'Oh, they were young rips⁹ !' she exclaimed. She threw back her head and laughed and for a moment her face was radiant, transfigured¹⁰ by her memories.

The things I had heard in the village came back to me; about the prosperous father and his family who lived in the big house many years ago. Then the foreign investments which crashed and the sudden change in circumstances. 'When the old father died he was almost penniless,' one old man had said. 'There's not much brass¹¹ there now'.

Probably just enough brass to keep Miss Stubbs and her animals alive and to pay Mrs Broadwith. Not enough to keep the garden dug or the house painted or for any of the normal little luxuries.

And, sitting there, drinking my tea, with the dogs in a row by the bedside and the cats making themselves comfortable on the bed itself, I felt as I had often felt

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| 8. escapade | : daring, mischievous, or adventurous act |
| 9. rip | : (colloquial) carefree person |
| 10. transfigure | : change the shape and appearance of something or someone |
| 11. brass | : (slang for) money |

before—a bit afraid of the responsibility I had. The one thing which brought some light into the life of the brave old woman was the devotion of this shaggy bunch whose eyes were never far from her face. And the snag was that they were all elderly—none of them less than ten years old.

They were perky¹² enough but all showing some of the signs of old age; Prince with his heart. Sally beginning to drink a lot of water which made me wonder if she was starting with a pyometra¹³. Ben growing steadily thinner with his nephritis¹⁴. I couldn't give him new kidneys and I hadn't much faith in the tablets I had prescribed. Another peculiar thing about Ben was that I was always having to clip his claws; they grew at an extraordinary rate.

The cats were better, though Susie was a bit scraggy. Arthur was the best of the bunch; he never seemed to ail anything beyond a tendency for his teeth to tartar¹⁵ up.

This must have been in Miss Stubbs' mind because, when I had finished my tea, she asked me to look at him. I hauled him across the bedspread and opened his mouth.

'Yes, there's a bit of the old trouble there. Might as well fix it while I'm here.'

Arthur was a huge, grey cat. His fine eyes, framed in the widest cat face I have ever seen, looked out on the world with an all-embracing benevolence¹⁶ and tolerance. His every movement was marked by immense dignity.

I started to scrape his teeth. There was no need for anybody to hold him; he sat there placidly and moved only once—when I was using forceps to crack off a tough

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|-----------------|---|
| 12. perky | : lively; showing interest or confidence |
| 13. pyometra | : pus in the uterus |
| 14. nephritis | : infection in the kidneys |
| 15. tartar | : chalk-like substance deposited on the teeth |
| 16. benevolence | : wish to do good |

piece of tartar from a back tooth and accidentally nicked his gum.

My next visit was less than a month later and was in response to an urgent summons from Mrs Broadwith at six o'clock in the evening. Ben had collapsed. I jumped straight into my car and in less than ten minutes was threading my way through the overgrown grass in the front garden with the animals watching from their window. The barking broke out as I knocked, but Ben's was absent. As I went into the little room I saw the old dog lying on his side, very still, by the bed.

D.O.A. is what we write in the day book. Dead on arrival. Just three words but they covered all kinds of situations—the end of milk fever cows, bloated bullocks, calves in fits. And tonight they meant that I wouldn't be clipping old Ben's claws any more.

'Well, it was quick, Miss Stubbs. I'm sure the old chap didn't suffer at all.' My words sounded lame and ineffectual.

The old lady was in full command of herself. No tears, only a fixity of expression as she looked down from the bed at her companion for so many years. My idea was to get him out of the place as quickly as possible and I pulled a blanket under him and lifted him up. As I was moving away, Miss Stubbs said, 'Wait a moment.' With an effort she turned on to her side and gazed at Ben. Still without changing expression, she reached out and touched his head lightly. Then she lay back calmly as I hurried from the room.

In the back kitchen I had a whispered conference with Mrs Broadwith. 'I'll run down t'village and get Fred Manners to come and bury him,' she said. 'And if you've got time could you stay with the old lady while I'm gone.'

I went back and sat down by the bed. Miss Subbs looked out of the window for a few moments, then turned to me. 'You know, Mr Herriot,' she said casually. 'It will be my turn next.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, tonight Ben has gone and I'm going to be the next one. I just know it.'

'Oh, nonsense! You're feeling a bit low, that's all. We all do when something like this happens.' But I was disturbed. I had never heard her even hint at such a thing before.

'I'm not afraid,' she said. 'I know there's something better waiting for me. I've never had any doubts.' There was silence between us as she lay calmly looking up at the card on the gas bracket.

Then the head on the pillow turned to me again. 'I have only one fear.' Her expression changed suddenly. A kind of terror flickered in her eyes and she quickly grasped my hand.

'It's my dogs and cats, Mr Herriot. I'm afraid I might never see them when I'm gone and it worries me so. You see, I know I'll be reunited with my parents and my brothers but... but....'

'Well, why not with your animals?'

'That's just it.' She rocked her head on the pillow and for the first time I saw tears on her cheeks. 'They say animals have no souls.'

'Who says?'

'Oh, I've read it and I know a lot of religious people believe it.'

'Well, I don't believe it.' I patted the hand which still grasped mine. 'If having a soul means being able to feel

love and loyalty and gratitude, then animals are better off than a lot of humans. You've nothing to worry about there.'

'Oh, I hope you're right. Sometimes I lie at night thinking about it.'

'I know I'm right, Miss Stubbs, and don't you argue with me. They teach us vets all about animals' souls.'

The tension left her face and she laughed with a return of her old spirit. 'I'm sorry to bore you with this and I'm not going to talk about it again. But before you go, I want you to be absolutely honest with me. I don't want reassurance from you—just the truth. I know you are very young but please tell me—what are your beliefs? Will my animals go with me?'

She stared intently into my eyes. I shifted in my chair and swallowed once or twice.

'Miss Stubbs, I'm afraid I'm a bit foggy¹⁷ about all this,' I said. 'But I'm absolutely certain of one thing. Wherever you are going, they are going too.'

She still stared at me but her face was calm again. 'Thank you, Mr Herriot, I know you are being honest with me. That is what you really believe, isn't it?'

'I do believe it,' I said. 'With all my heart I believe it.'

It must have been about a month later and it was entirely by accident that I learned I had seen Miss Stubbs for the last time. I was on my rounds and a farmer happened to mention that the cottage in Corby village was up for sale.

'But what about Miss Stubbs?' I asked.

17. foggy

: confused; not clear

'Oh, went off sudden about three weeks ago. House is in a bad state, they say nothing has been done about it for years.'

'Mrs Broadwith isn't staying on, then?'

'Nay, I hear she's staying at t'other end of village.'

'Do you know what's happened to the dogs and cats?'

'What dogs and cats?'

I cut my visit short. And I didn't go straight home though it was nearly lunch time. Instead I drove at top speed to Corby and asked the first person I saw where Mrs Broadwith was living.

It was a tiny house but attractive and Mrs Broadwith answered my knock herself.

'Oh, come in, Mr Herriot. It's right good of you to call.' I went inside and we sat facing each other across a scrubbed table top.

'Well, it was sad about the old lady,' she said.

'Yes, I've only just heard.'

'She had a peaceful end. Just slept away at finish.'

'I'm glad to hear that.'

Mrs Broadwith looked round the room. 'I was real lucky to get this place—it's just what I've always wanted.'

I could contain myself no longer. 'What's happened to the animals?' I blurted out.

'Oh, they're in t'garden,' she said calmly. 'I've got a grand big stretch at back.' She got up and opened the door and with a surge of relief I watched my old friends pour in.

'They look great, Mrs Broadwith. How long are they going to be here?'

‘They’re here for good. I think just as much about them as t’old lady ever did and I couldn’t be parted from them. They’ll have a good home with me as long as they live.’

‘This is wonderful,’ I said. ‘But won’t you find it just a bit...er... expensive to feed them?’

‘Nay, you don’t have to worry about that. I ’ave a bit put away.’

‘Well, fine, fine, and I’ll be looking in now and then to see how they are. I’m through the village every few days.’ I got up and started for the door.

Mrs Broadwith held up her hand. ‘There’s just one thing I’d like you to do before they start selling off the things at the cottage. Would you please pop in and collect what’s left of your medicines. They’re in t’front room.’

I took the key and drove along to the other end of the village. As I pushed open the rickety¹⁸ gate and began to walk through the tangled grass the front of the cottage looked strangely lifeless without the faces of the dogs at the window: and when the door creaked open and I went inside the silence was like a heavy pall¹⁹.

Nothing had been moved. The bed with its rumpled blankets was still in the corner. I moved around, picking up half-empty bottles, a jar of ointment, the cardboard box with old Ben’s tablets—a lot of good they had done him.

When I had got everything I looked slowly round the little room. I wouldn’t be coming here any more and at the door I paused and read for the last time the card which hung over the empty bed.

(Slightly abridged)

18. rickety : likely to break and collapse

19. pall : heavy cloth spread over a coffin

Understanding the story

1. The narrator of the story is
 - (a) a physician
 - (b) a clergyman
 - (c) a veterinary surgeon
2. "...Mrs Broadwith who looked after Miss Stubbs would push all the animals except my patient into the back kitchen..."
'my patient' here refers to
 - (a) Miss Stubbs
 - (b) one of Miss Stubbs' pet dogs and cats
 - (c) a dog called Ben
3. Miss Stubbs led a very simple life because
 - (a) she didn't believe in leading a luxurious life.
 - (b) she was too sad a person to enjoy even the normal little luxuries.
 - (c) she couldn't afford even the normal little luxuries.
4. Why does the author refer to Miss Stubbs' little room as 'her world for so many years'? What was wrong with her?
5. Look at the following lines from the text:
'I felt as I had often felt before—a bit afraid of the responsibility I had.'
Why was the narrator afraid of, the responsibility?
6. Had Miss Stubbs always been poor? How do we know?
7. Why did the narrator tell Miss Stubbs that vets are taught all about animals' souls?
8.
 - (a) Did Miss Stubbs have a knowledge of her approaching death? How can we tell?
 - (b) Did Miss Stubbs' fears about her death come true? In which line does the narrator suggest this?
9. 'I moved around, picking up half-empty bottles, a jar of ointment, the cardboard box with old Ben's tablets—a lot of good they had done him'.
Had the tablets done Ben any good? How? Why does the narrator make this statement?

Appreciating the Story

1. One notices a dramatic, unexpected change in Miss Stubbs' state of mind as the story progresses. How can you explain this?
2. One of the observations made by the narrator of the story is given below:

'Probably just enough brass to keep Miss Stubbs and her animals alive and to pay Mrs. Broadwith.'

Does it seem natural to you—an ailing invalid with very limited **resources keeping as many as six animals as pets**? Do you think there is some exaggeration here on the part of the writer? Why/Why not?
3. If you are asked to write a short note on Miss Stubbs' character, what details about the lady would you like to include?
4. What role does the cardboard card play in the story? What significance would you attach to it?

Further Reading:

Herriot, J: It shouldn't happen to a vet.

COIN DIVER

Cyprian Ekwensi

About the Author:

Born in Minna (Northern Nigeria) and educated in Ibadan, Ghana and London, Ekwensi has become an outstanding chronicler of Nigerian city life. In his short stories and novels he depicts the hopes and disappointments, the gaiety and the sadness, the cruelty and the kindness in the lives of the masses living in Nigerian cities. His well-known novels include *Jagua Nana*, *People of the City*, and *Beautiful Feathers*. *Coin Diver* is taken from his collection of short stories called *Lokotown*.

In the bright sunlight of the Freetown afternoon, Nancy came down the lane. Charlie, the coin diver¹, pushed aside the flower-bush and gazed at her. Tall she was, with a rich black skin and eyes big and black and lips made red, so red, with lipstick. Her ear-rings—big golden loops—dangled in rhythm with her light footsteps. Dust rose lightly from her white sandals but her eyes were bright as the ribbons in her straw hat. *Fine gal*, thought Charlie, *Like say dem born am for America, not Sa Leone!*² For a moment he forgot why he had been waiting for her behind the bush: to ask her to be his wife.

And she was alone too—alone! He was in a flutter. 'How I will tell her this thing? I got no money like de rich men who come for Grand Palm. An' I want dis gal who

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| 1. coin diver | : one who dives into the sea to collect coins thrown by passengers in ships. |
| 2. Fine gal Like say dem born am for America, not Sa Leone | : Fine girl. Like let us say, an American girl, not one born in Sa Leone |

sing like canary. Because of Nancy, everybody who come to Freetown mus' go to Grand Palm Hotel to lodge—white man, black man, all de stranger!'

He stepped forward, hopefully, 'Nancy...' Her smile encouraged him. 'Nancy, I got to tell you somethin...'

She was smiling even more sweetly, but her eyes bored right through him and beyond. Charlie, confused, turned to see what she was gazing at.

In the path behind him stood Diamond Joe, his bitter rival. Joe's gold tooth gleamed. He extended a heavily-ringed hand and clasped Nancy's delicate and shapely fingers. Charlie boiled with envy. He saw them walk away; saw Nancy slip a parcel she had been carrying into Joe's hands. He was disgusted at the way they held hands and whispered into each other's ears and even looked back over their shoulders to laugh at him, no doubt. He watched them till they turned the corner, and even then his eyes still focussed on the bush that had hidden them; his ears still strained for sounds of their happiness, for their sneering contempt of him.

He looked down at his canvas shoes, tunic shirt and white drill shorts. He knew now why he had failed. He had come to court a girl like Nancy, the singing star of the Grand Palm, the most exclusive social spot in Freetown, and he was unimpressively dressed. *But, if this gal like me, she no go worry 'bout my dress.*

He remembered the night when he first heard Nancy sing, and how since then he had known no peace of mind. He had even succeeded once in entering her dressing-room. It was shortly before she went on stage, and her girls were helping her adorn herself. Charlie was ill at ease. Things destined for her ears only would be heard by others. Why did she not send the maids away? Perhaps

they were mocking him now. Why did she keep glancing at her watch, slim and expensive though it was?

'What is it now, Mister?' She was marking out her brow with a pencil.

Charlie averted his gaze. 'I—got a little money I been savin!'

'And you want me to marry *you*,' she flashed, serving up his most secret thoughts in a manner which made nonsense of his ambition.

'No. . . No, not so! I—I think say you will like to improve you voice. . .' What was wrong with telling her the truth? This was not what he meant to say, but it had now been said.

She frowned. 'You mean to tell me I don' sing well?'

'Not so!' Charlie's hands rose in protest. 'I beg pardon, Madam. No, you sing like canary.³ Like canary! But you know. . . nowadays, anybody in Africa who do anythin' fine mus' travel an' see de world,' Charlie had forgotten the two maids present. For one brief moment, he saw how intently Nancy was listening. Then the spark died out of her eyes. She sighed.

'Thank you for the offer, Mr——'

'Them call me Charlie. . . Am one of de people who dive into de sea when de mail boat come. I kin⁴ die for your sake. Lord works wonders! Your voice!. . . I never hear the like!'

'Flattery, eh? I'm sorry I can't accept your offer.'

Did he see tears in her eyes? No. . . pure imagination. Even so he could not concentrate on his work. More cargo boats and passenger liners were calling at Freetown. More

3. canary : yellow-feathered song-bird

4. kin : can

coins were spinning into the Atlantic while sun-burnt men and women from the outside world thronged the gangways, laughing. But Charlie knew that less and less money was finding its way into his own pockets. He stood in his paper-light canoe⁵ and hailed:

‘A penny? . . . How you, Ma’am! A penny? I kiant sell this boat to you. I bought it to try my luck. . . Whenever a boat comes in, I come aboard and try my luck...’

Those words. Where was their music? Deftly⁶ he guided his paper-light canoe on the jumping surface of the bight⁷, trying desperately to be light-hearted. ‘What about a tanner Ma’am? What about it, Ma’am. . . Well, you kin have a look. . . I just goin’ over side. . . The ship’s getting ready to movin’. . . What about a good-bye, Ma’am?’

Looking up at the rearing⁹ wall of the side of the vessel, at the tangled skeins of rope¹⁰ dangling downwards, Charlie knew he was not the same man without Nancy. As he could not have Nancy, he must have something—a symbol¹¹ of her. Nancy to him meant music. If he had music! If he had. . . music. . . But how? Not for him the gramophones and the radiograms. No. His music must be different, natural as Nancy’s; fresh and clean—like a canary. That was it! A canary. He should have thought of it before.

He told no one of his plans because he knew they would call him ‘silly’. They would laugh and say, ‘Charlie,

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|-------------------|---|
| 5. canoe | : a light boat |
| 6. deftly | : quickly and cleverly |
| 7. bight | : circle made in a rope (here) curve in a shore |
| 8. tanner | : (slang) British silver coin |
| 9. rearing | : (here) looming, rising |
| 10. skein of rope | : quantity of rope tied loosely together |
| 11. symbol | : a sign representing something |

you done gone craze? You mean, you goin' to Cape Verde on you canoe—jus' to catch canary, because woman refuse you?' They would discourage him and so he told no one. He tied up his money in an old cloth belted to his waist. He went to market and bought food; he put fresh water in a kerosene tin. And at night, when no one saw him, he slid quietly northwards in his bigger canoe.

For days he was on the wide Atlantic. Sun and wind bit into his face and back. Hunger clawed at his stomach. The porpoises leapt about and the sharks waited for him to drown while the whales tossed his canoe. But when he finally eased off in the Canary Islands, Charlie felt that nothing could be more romantic than capturing a wonderful canary—one that sang like Nancy.

At the bazaar Charlie found just what he wanted—a canary with a voice like Nancy. But she cost him all he had in the world. With no means of returning to Freetown, Charlie told his hard-luck story to the captain of a cargo boat who had seen him at the bazaar. The captain was so impressed by Charlie's courage and the magic of Nancy the canary that he signed¹² Charlie on his boat for the home ward journey to Freetown.

His duties on deck did not give him much time, but Charlie never forgot to take the greatest care of the canary. He called her Nancy. Her cage was never without red pepper and water. All through the stormy passage Nancy delighted the crew with ceaseless gymnastics of song¹³. Holding the cage at arm's length Charlie's heart swelled with joy. 'Now, when I want to hear good music, I don't go no more to the Grand Palm. I got me own Nancy in the house!' He laughed. 'Wait till Diamon' Joe see this!'

12. sign on : (here) employ

13. gymnastics
of song : singing with great variety

Back in Freetown, Charlie found it impossible to hide such talent. In a week, everyone had heard of Nancy, the coin diver's canary. Tourists touching Freetown went first to the Grand Palm, then came straight to Charlie's little shack¹⁴ to hear Nancy sing. Once a white woman brought Charlie a packet of rare seeds. An American tourist, on hearing the price Charlie had paid for the bird, offered double for it: in dollars. Charlie would not sell. He was quite sure that Nancy of the Grand Palm had heard of the bird; and so also must Diamond Joe.

A new passenger liner¹⁵ had come into port, and as Charlie prepared to go down for the day's work, he heard a knock on his door. It was Nancy, and Diamond Joe was with her. Charlie had not seen her since his trip to Cape Verde and now it seemed to him that she had become even more desirable. Nancy, the bird, could only sing. It could not replace the love he had in his heart for Nancy of the Grand Palm. He watched her eyes for signs of envy. He saw only admiration. An eager joy had given vitality to her cheeks, and her teeth shone with laughter. But Diamond's eyes, red as Nancy's new frock, depicted greed, envy, jealousy. All the meanness in his nature seemed to bubble up at the sight of Nancy's innocent happiness.

'I want your canary,' he said shortly.

'Not for sell, Diamon' Joe. I tell you so yesterday when we workin' in de wharf.¹⁶

'Ah'll pay you what you spen' three times!'

'They awready offer me more, Joe. I no sell.'

14. shack : small, roughly built shed, hut, or house

15. liner : ship

16. wharf : wooden or stone structure at which ships stop for (un) loading goods

Nancy's eyes darted from one to the other. 'Now, you two men, don't fight now!'

She made the bird sing. She stared at it in rapt admiration, cooing¹⁷ all the time. Charlie flattered himself that her enthusiasm had some faint far-off connection with affection for its owner. Or was she merely trying to annoy Diamond Joe? He observed the disgruntled look on Joe's face as they left. He knew also that his journey to Cape Verde had been in vain. He still loved Nancy; more so than ever before. And by bringing this bird back to Freetown, was he not harming her reputation in some way?

All through his work that day, the dreadful thought remained with him: he was undermining Nancy's position in the Grand Palm. So engrossed was he with his own thoughts that he did not notice the absence of Diamond Joe. He was glad when the boat sailed away and he could go home. As he turned the key of his front door, a queerness came to him. Someone had been in this room. The cage appeared to have been shifted. He whistled. He walked straight to the cage and took it down. At the bottom of it was a lifeless form. Nancy, the canary, was dead.

The very air about him froze into silence. Charlie lost count of time. Slowly it dawned on him that his canary had not died a natural death. Someone who disliked its existence had destroyed it. He remembered now how Diamond Joe had looked at the bird in the morning, how he had not been seen at work.

Charlie rolled up his shirt-sleeves and walked towards the beach, talking to no one. Children called out, 'Charlie!' and one of them came and said, 'You lookin' for

17. cooing

: making a soft, murmuring sound (as of pigeons)

somebody?' 'Yes, Diamon' Joe...' They said: 'He jus' went dat away....'

Charlie caught up with him in a drinking house. He smashed his way into the room and seized Diamond Joe by the coat-collar, smashing his face with his mallet¹⁸ of a right hand.

'Where's my canary? Talk!'

Tables were overturned as both men fought. It broke up in disorder when Diamond threatened to send for the police, but Charlie was making for the Grand Palm in search of Nancy. He did not find her, and all through the day he walked the streets, searching for her.

When evening came, he guessed that she must have left. He felt terribly depressed as he turned his steps homewards to his hut without music. Why had fate conspired to deny him of his simple pleasure?

He pushed his door open. A shadowy form slipped towards him and he stepped backwards, fists clenched. It was a woman.

'Charlie!...'

'Nancy, sorry I think is Diamon' come to murder me.'

'Charlie, I beg you to—forgive me! Is my mistake.'

'What's matter, Nancy? You done me wrong?'

'Is jealousy, Charlie. I come here with Diamon' Joe. I told him: jus' change the canary. Put another one an' open the cage let Nancy fly away. Instead, you know what Diamond do? He's too mean. He jus' strangle Nancy.'

Charlie stood confused. Dimly he realized that something new was happening to his world. A light was glowing in the dark. Nancy was sobbing now.

18. mallet of
a hand

: hand as strong as a hammer

'You see, everybody loved your Nancy better than me. Even you! Since you got your Nancy, you don' come to see me in the Grand Palm! That's why Joe killed your bird.'

'He kill the happy I get in my belly¹⁹ too. How can man be happy without music? I mean—*natural* music!'

'Charlie, I—I think I kin sing as well as the canary. Will you put me in your cage, I mean—your house—' And Nancy smiled at the comparison. 'Will you? I promise to sing for you every day and for ever as my voice is good—'

Charlie looked into her face to see if she meant it. But the tears veiled her eyes and she could not stand his gaze. 'Don' cry, Nancy,' he said, reaching out in the dark and touching her soft shoulders.

Her face buried itself in his rough shirt and he could feel the fragrance of her hair and the warmth of her as she sobbed against his breast. He took her arm and they walked out towards the beating surf²⁰ of the Gulf of Guinea. Charlie asked himself, looking out over the wide horizons²¹: is this Nancy whose hand I hold, or am I dreaming? She sighed and he knew he was wide awake—and happy.

19. the happy
I get in
my belly

: the happiness within me.

20. surf

: waves breaking in white foam on the seashore

21. horizon

: line at which the earth or the sea and the sky seem to meet

Understanding the Story

1. Where does most of the story of 'Coin diver' take place?
 - (a) Freetown
 - (b) Canary Islands
 - (c) An African village
 - (d) The Atlantic Ocean
2. What does Charlie do for a living?
3. The very first paragraph contains a brief description of Nancy. Some of the details described there give us the impression Nancy is perhaps a fashionable city girl. What are they?
4. Say which of the following statements about the meeting between Charlie, Nancy and Diamond Joe described in the first five paragraphs of the story are true and which false.
 - (i) The meeting takes place in Grand Palm Hotel.
 - (ii) Charlie expected to meet Nancy.
 - (iii) Diamond Joe expected to meet Nancy.
 - (iv) Nancy expected to meet Diamond Joe.
 - (v) The meeting is purely imaginary—it is one of Charlie's dreams.
 - (vi) This is the first meeting between Charlie and Nancy.
5. Why does Charlie fail to attract Nancy in spite of his fierce love for her?
6. When Charlie meets Nancy for the first time in her dressing room, Charlie is
 - (a) nervous
 - (b) cold
 - (c) angry
 - (d) impressive
 - (e) childish(Tick All the right answers).
7. Charlie buys and keeps a singing canary in order
 - (a) to show Nancy that he no longer needs her.
 - (b) to show Nancy that a bird is far more attractive than her.
 - (c) to have something in place of Nancy because he feels he cannot attract her.
 - (d) to annoy Nancy and Diamond Joe.

8. When Nancy and Diamond Joe come to his house to see the canary, Charlie expects to find in Nancy's eyes signs of envy; but he finds admiration instead. Why?
- (a) The courage and adventurous nature of Charlie attracts Nancy.
 - (b) Nancy considers the canary a much greater singer than herself.
 - (c) Nancy is very humble and respects talents in others—even in birds and animals.
9. At the end of the story, is Charlie unhappy that the canary died? Why/Why not?

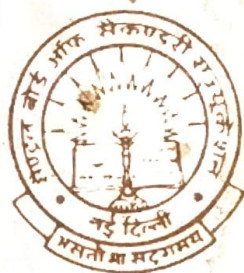
Appreciating the Story

1. None of the three characters—Charlie, Nancy and Diamond Joe—is a native speaker of English. However, since the story is told in English their conversation also is given in English. The writer Ekwensi puts in their mouths ungrammatical English. What does he try to suggest? Is the English used by all the three equally ungrammatical? Or are there differences in their use of English? Give examples in support of your answer.
2. At the end of the story Charlie and Nancy are happy; Diamond Joe is not. Do you think the story has a happy ending? If you do, your sympathies are obviously with Charlie. Why does he evoke your sympathy? Why doesn't Diamond Joe's loss—that Nancy has gone over to Charlie—evoke your sympathy?
3. Do you think the story is realistic? Is it possible for a canary to "undermine Nancy's position" in a hotel, as Charlie fears? Would you say the characters are, as a whole, foolish? What in your view is the author's suggestion?

Further Reading

Ekwensi, C. *Lokotown and Other Stories*.

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R. D. &
P. D. &
P. D. &



Dr. D. D. &

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